

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER 2, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TOM FINDS HIS TONGUE.

N EARLY a week elapsed after Tom's last interview with the Squire before he was again invited to Pincote, and after what had passed between himself and Mr. Culpepper he would not go there again without a special invitation. It is probable that the Squire would not have sent for him even at the end of a week had he not grown so thoroughly tired of having to cope with Mrs. McDermot single handed that he was ready to call in assistance from any quarter that promised relief. He knew that Tom would assist him if only a hint were given that he was wanted to do so. And Tom did relieve him; so that for the first time for many days the Squire really enjoyed his dinner.

Notwithstanding all this, matters were so arranged between the Squire and Mrs. McDermot that no opportunity was given Tom of being alone with Jane even for five minutes. The first time this happened he thought that it might perhaps have arisen from mere accident. But the next time he went up to Pincote he saw too clearly what was intended to allow him to remain any longer in doubt. That night, after shaking hands with Tom at parting, Jane found in her palm a tiny note, the contents of which were two lines only. "Should you be shopping in Duxley either to-morrow or next day, I shall be at the toll-gate on the Snelsham road from twelve till one o'clock."

Next day, at half-past twelve to the minute, Jane and her pony-carriage found themselves at the Snelsham toll-gate. There was Tom, sure enough, who got into the trap and took the reins. He turned presently into a by-road that led to nowhere in particular, and there earned the gratitude of Diamond by letting him lapse into a quiet walk which enabled him to take sly nibbles at the road-side grass as he jogged contentedly along.

Two or three minutes passed in silence. Then Tom spoke. "Jane," he said, and it was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name, "Jane, your father has forbidden me to make love to you."

It seemed as if Jane had nothing to say either for or against this statement. She only breathed a little more quickly, and a lovelier colour flushed her cheeks. But just then Diamond swerved towards a tempting tuft of grass. The carriage gave a slight jerk, and Tom fancied—but it might be nothing more than fancy—that, instinctively, Jane drew a little closer to him. And when Diamond had been punished by the slightest possible flick with the whip between his ears, and was again jogging peacefully on, Jane did not get farther away again, being, perhaps, still slightly nervous; and when Tom looked down there was a little gloved hand resting, light as a feather, on his arm. It was impossible to resist the temptation. Dispensing with the whip for a moment he lifted the little hand tenderly to his lips and kissed it. He was not repulsed.

"Yes, dearest," he went on, "I am absolutely forbidden to make love to you. I can only imagine that your aunt has been talking to your father about us. Be that as it may, he has forbidden me to walk out with you, or even to see you alone. The reason why I asked you to meet me to-day was to tell you of these things."

Still Jane kept silence. Only from the little hand, which had somehow found its way back on to his arm, there came the faintest possible pressure, hardly heavy enough to have crushed a butterfly.

"I told him that I loved you," resumed Tom, "and he could not say that it was a crime to do so. But when I told him that I had never made love to you, or asked you to marry me, he seemed inclined to doubt my veracity. However, I set his mind at rest by giving him my word of honour that, even supposing you were willing to have me—a point respecting which I had very strong doubts indeed—I would not take you for my wife without first obtaining his full consent to do so."

Here Diamond, judging from the earnestness of Tom's tone that his thoughts were elsewhere, and deeming the opportunity a favourable one to steal a little breathing time, gradually slackened his slow pace into a still slower one, till at last he came to a dead stand. Admonished by a crack of the whip half a yard above his head that Tom was still wide awake, he put on a tremendous spurt—for him—which, as they were going down hill at the time, was not difficult. But no sooner had they reached a level bit of road again than the spurt toned itself down to the customary slow trot, with, however, an extra whisk of the tail now and then which seemed to imply: "Mark well what a fiery steed I could be if I only chose to exert myself."

"All this but brings me to one point," said Tom: "that I have never yet told you that I loved you, that I have never yet asked you to become my wife. To-day, then—here—this very moment, I tell you that I do love you as truly and sincerely as it is possible for man to

love ; and here I ask you to become my wife. Get along, Diamond, do, sir."

"Dearest, you are not blind," he went on. "You must have seen, you must have known, for a long time past, that my heart—my love—were wholly yours ; and that I might one day win you for my own has been a hope, a blissful dream, that has haunted me and charmed my life for longer than I can tell. I ought, perhaps, to have spoken of this to you before, but there were certain reasons for my silence which it is not necessary to dilate upon now, but which, if you care to hear them, I will explain to you another time. Here, then, I ask you whether you feel as if you could ever learn to love me, whether you can ever care for me enough to become my wife. Speak to me, darling—whisper the one little word I burn to hear. Lift your eyes to mine, and let me read there that which will make me happy for life."

Except they two, there was no human being visible. They were alone with the trees, and the birds, and the sailing clouds. There was no one to overhear them save that sly old Diamond, and he pretended to be not listening a bit. For the second time he came to a stand-still, and this time his artfulness remained unreproved and unnoticed.

Jane trembled a little, but her eyes were still cast down. Tom tried to see into their depths but could not. "You promised papa that you would not take me from him without his consent," she said, speaking in little more than a whisper. "That consent you will never obtain."

"That consent I shall obtain if you will only give me yours first."

He spoke firmly and unhesitatingly. Jane could hardly believe her ears. She looked up at him in sheer surprise. For the first time their eyes met.

"You don't know papa as well as I do—how obstinate he is, how full of whims and crotchetts. No—no ; I feel sure that he will never consent."

"And I feel equally sure that he will. I have no fear on that score—none. But I will put the question to you in another way, in the short business-like way that comes most naturally to a man like me. Jane, dearest, if I can persuade your father to give you to me, will you be so given ? Will you come to me and be my own—my wife—for ever ?"

Still no answer. Only imperceptibly she crept a little closer to his side—a very little. He took that for his answer. First one arm went round her and then the other. He drew her to his heart, he drew her to his lips ; he kissed her and called her his own. And she? Well, painful though it be to write it, she never reproved him in the least, but seemed content to sit there with her head resting on his shoulder, and to suffer Love's sweet punishment of kisses in silence.

It is on record that Diamond was the first to move.

While standing there he had fallen into a snooze, and had dreamt

that another pony had been put into his particular stall and was at that moment engaged in munching his particular truss of hay. Overcome by his feelings, he turned deliberately round and started for home at a gentle trot. Thus disturbed, Tom and Jane came back to sublunary matters with a laugh, and a little confusion on Jane's part. Tom drove her back as far as the toll-gate and then shook hands and left her. Jane reached home as one in a blissful dream.

Three days later Tom received a note in the Squire's own crabbed hand-writing, asking him to go up to Pincote as early as possible. He was evidently wanted for something out of the ordinary way. Wondering a little, he went. The Squire received him in high good humour and was not long in letting him know why he had sent for him.

"I have had some fellows here from the railway company," he said. "They want to buy Prior's Croft."

Tom's eyebrows went up a little. "I thought, sir, it would prove to be a profitable speculation by and by. Did they name any price?"

"No, nothing was said as to price. They simply wanted to know whether I was willing to sell it."

"And you told them that you were?"

"I told them that I would take time to think about it. I didn't want to seem too eager, you know."

"That's right, sir. Play with them a little before you finally hook them."

"From what they said, they want to build a station on the Croft."

"Yes, a new passenger station, with plenty of siding accommodation."

"Ah! you know something about it, do you?"

"I know this much, sir, that the proposal of the new company to run a fresh line into Duxley has put the old company on their mettle. In place of the dirty ram-shackle station with which we have all had to be content for so many years, they are going to give us a new station, handsome and commodious; and Prior's Croft is the place named as the most probable site for the new terminus."

"Hang me, if I don't believe you knew something of this all along!" said the Squire. "If not, how could you have raised that heavy mortgage for me?"

There was a twinkle in Tom's eyes but he said nothing. Mr. Culpepper might have been still further surprised had he known that the six thousand pounds was Tom's own money, and that, although the mortgage was made out in another name, it was to Tom alone that he was indebted.

"Have you made up your mind as to the price you intend to ask, sir?"

"No, not yet. In fact, it was partly to consult you on that point that I sent for you."

"Somewhere about nine thousand pounds, sir, I should think, would be a fair price."

The Squire shook his head. "They will never give anything like so much as that."

"I think they will, sir, if the affair is judiciously managed. How can they refuse in the face of a mortgage for six thousand pounds?"

"There's something in that, certainly."

"Then there are the villas—yet unbuilt it is true—but the plans of which are already drawn, and the foundations of some of which are already laid. You will require to be liberally remunerated for your disappointment and outlay in respect of them."

"I see it all now. Splendid idea that of the villas."

"Considering the matter in all its bearings, nine thousand pounds may be regarded as a very moderate sum."

"I won't ask a penny less."

"With it you will be able to clear off both the mortgage and the loan of two thousand, and will then have a thousand left for your expenses in connection with the villas."

The Squire rubbed his hands. "I wish all my speculations had turned out as successful as this one," he said. "This one I owe to you, Bristow. You have done me a service that I can never forget."

Tom rose to go. "Mrs. McDermot quite well, sir?" he said, with the most innocent air in the world.

"If the way she eats and drinks is anything to go by, she was never better in her life. But if you take her own account, she's never well—a confirmed invalid she calls herself. I've no patience with the woman, though she is my sister. A day's hard scrubbing at the wash-tub every week would do her a world of good. If she would only pack up her trunks and go, how thankful I should be!"

"If you wish her to shorten her visit at Pincote, I think you might easily persuade her to do so."

"I'd give something to find out how. No, no, Bristow, you may depend that she's a fixture here for the next three or four months. She knows—no woman alive better—when she's in comfortable quarters."

"If I had your sanction to doing so, sir, I think that I could induce her to hasten her departure from Pincote."

The Squire rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "You are a queer fellow, Bristow," he said, "and you have done some strange things, but to induce my sister to leave Pincote before she's ready to go will cap all that you've done yet."

"I cannot of course induce her to leave Pincote till she is willing to go, but after a little quiet talk with me, it is possible that she may be willing, and even anxious, to get away as quickly as possible."

The Squire shook his head. "You don't know Fanny McDermot as well as I do," he said.

"Have I your permission to try the experiment?"

"You have—and my devoutest wishes for your success. Only you must not compromise me in any way in the matter."

"You may safely trust me not to do that. But you must give me an invitation to come and stay with you at Pincote for a week."

"With all my heart."

"I shall devote myself very assiduously to Mrs. McDermot, so that you must not be surprised if we seem to be very great friends in the course of a couple of days."

"Do as you like, boy. I'll take no notice. But she's an old soldier, is Fan, and if for a single moment she suspects what you are after, she'll nail her colours to the mast, defy us all, and stop here for six months longer."

"It is, of course, quite possible that I may fail," said Tom, "but somehow, I hardly think that I shall."

"We'll have a glass of sherry together and drink to your success. By-the-bye, have you contrived yet to purge your brain of that love-sick tomfoolery?"

"If, sir, you intend that phrase to apply to my feelings with regard to Miss Culpepper, I can only say that they are totally unchanged."

"What an idiot you are in some things, Bristow!" said the Squire, crustily. "Remember this—I'll have no love-making here next week."

"You need have no fear on that score, sir."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXIT MRS. MACDERMOT.

TOM and his portmanteau reached Pincote together a few days after his last conversation with the Squire. Mrs. McDermot understood that he had been invited to spend a week there in order to assist her brother with his books and farm accounts. It seemed to her a very injudicious thing to do, but she did not say much about it. In truth, she was rather pleased than otherwise to have Tom there. It was dreadfully monotonous to have to spend one evening after another with no company save that of her brother and Jane. She was tired of her audience, and her audience were tired of her. Mr. Bristow, as she knew already, could talk well, was lively company, and, above all things, was an excellent listener. She had done her duty by her brother in warning him of what was going on between Mr. Bristow and her niece; if, after that, the Squire chose to let the two young people come together, it was not her place to dispute his right to do so.

Tom was very attentive to her at dinner that day. Of Jane he took no notice beyond what the occasion absolutely demanded. Mrs. McDermot was agreeably surprised. "He has come to his senses at

last, as I thought he would," she said to herself. "Grown tired of Jane's society, and no wonder. There's nothing in her."

As soon as the cloth was removed, Jane excused herself on the score of a headache and left the room. The Squire got into an easy chair and settled himself down for a post-prandial nap. Tom moved his chair a little nearer that of the widow.

"I have grieved to see you so far from well, Mrs. McDermot," he said, as he poured himself out another glass of wine. "My father was a doctor, and I suppose I caught the habit from him of reading the signs of health or sickness in people's faces."

Mrs. McDermot was visibly discomposed. She was a great coward with regard to her health, and Tom knew it.

"Yes," she said, "I have not been well for some time past. But I was not aware that the traces of my indisposition were so plainly visible to others."

"They are visible to me because, as I tell you, I am half a doctor both by birth and bringing up. You seem to me, Mrs. McDermot, pardon me for saying so—to have been fading—to have been going backward, as it were, almost from the day of your arrival at Pincote."

Mrs. McDermot coughed and moved uneasily in her chair. "I have been a confirmed invalid for years," she said, querulously, "and yet no one will believe me when I tell them so."

"I can very readily believe it," said Tom, gravely. Then he lapsed into an ominous silence.

"I—I did not know that I was looking any worse now than when I first came to Pincote," she said at last.

"You seem to me to be much older-looking, much more careworn, with lines making their appearance round your eyes and mouth, such as I never noticed before. So, at least, it strikes me, but I may be, and I dare say I am, quite wrong."

The widow seemed at a loss what to say. Tom's words had evidently rendered her very uneasy. "Then what would you advise me to do?" she said, after a time. "If you can detect the disease so readily, you should have no difficulty in specifying the remedy."

"Ah, now I am afraid you are getting beyond my depth," said Tom, with a smile. "I am little more than a theorizer, you know; but I should have no hesitation in saying that your disorder is connected with the mind."

"Gracious me, Mr. Bristow!"

"Yes, Mrs. McDermot; my opinion is that you are suffering from an undue development of brain power."

The widow looked puzzled. "I was always considered rather intellectual," she said, with a glance at her brother. But the Squire still slept.

"You are very intellectual, madam; and that is just where the evil lies."

"Excuse me, but I fail to follow you."

"You are gifted with a very large and a very powerful brain," said Tom, with the utmost gravity. The Squire snorted suddenly in his sleep. The widow held up a warning finger. There was silence in the room till the Squire's gentle long-drawn snores announced that he was again happily fast asleep.

"Very few of us are so specially gifted," resumed Tom. "But every special gift necessitates a special obligation in return. You, with your massive brain, must find that brain plenty of work to do—a sufficiency of congenial employment—otherwise it will inevitably turn upon itself, grow morbid and hypochondriacal, and slowly but surely deteriorate, till it ends by becoming—what I hardly like to say."

"Really, Mr. Bristow, this conversation is to me most interesting," said the widow. "Your views are thoroughly original, but, at the same time, I feel that they are perfectly correct."

"The sphere of your intellectual activity is far too narrow and confined," resumed Tom; "your brain has not sufficient pabulum to keep it in a state of healthy activity. You want to mix more with the world—to mix more with clever people, like yourself. It was never intended by Nature that you should lose yourself among the narrow coteries of provincial life: the metropolis claims you: the world at large claims you. A conversationalist so brilliant, so incisive, with such an exhaustless fund of new ideas, can only hope to find her equals among the best circles of London or Parisian society."

"How thoroughly you appreciate me, Mr. Bristow!" said the widow, all in a flutter of gratified vanity, as she edged her chair still closer to Tom. "It is as you say. I feel that I am lost here—that I am altogether out of my element. I stay here more as a matter of duty—of principle—than of anything else. Not that it is any gratification to me, as you may well imagine, to be buried alive in this dull hole. But my brother is getting old and infirm—breaking fast, I'm afraid, poor man," here the Squire gave a louder snore than common; "while Jane is little more than a foolish girl. They both need the guidance of a kind but firm hand. The interests of both demand a clear brain to look after them."

"My dear madam, I agree with you in toto. Your Spartan views with regard to the duties of every-day life are mine exactly. But we must not forget that we have still another duty—that of carefully preserving our health, especially when our lives are invaluable to the epoch in which we live. You, my dear madam, are killing yourself by inches."

"Oh, Mr. Bristow, not quite so bad as that, I hope!"

"What I say, I say advisedly. I think that, without difficulty, I can

specify a few symptoms of the cerebral disorder to which you are a victim. You will bear me out if what I say is correct."

"Yes, yes; please go on."

"You are a sufferer from sleeplessness to a certain extent. The body would fain rest, being tired and worn out, but the active brain will not allow it to do so. Am I right, Mrs. McDermot?"

"I cannot dispute the accuracy of what you say."

"Your nature being large and eminently sympathetic, but not finding sufficient vent for itself in the narrow circle to which it is condemned, busies itself, for lack of other aliment, with the concerns and daily doings of those around it, giving them the benefit of its vast experience and intuitive good sense; but being met sometimes with coldness instead of sympathy, it collapses, falls back upon itself, and becomes morbid for want of proper intellectual companionship. May I hope that you follow me?"

"Yes—yes, perfectly," said the widow, but looking somewhat mystified, notwithstanding.

"The brain thus thrown back upon itself engenders an irritability of the nerves, which is altogether abnormal. Fits of peevishness, of ill-temper, of causeless fault-finding, gradually supervene; till at length all natural amiability of disposition vanishes entirely, and there is nothing left but a wretched hypochondriac, a misery to himself and all around him."

"Gracious me! Mr. Bristow, what a picture! But I hope you do not put me down as a misery to myself and all around me."

"Far from it—very far from it—my dear Mrs. McDermot. You are only in the premonitory stage at present. Let us hope that, in your case, the later stages will not follow."

"I hope not, with all my heart."

"Of course, you have not yet been troubled with hearing voices?"

"Hearing voices! Whatever do you mean, Mr. Bristow?"

"One of the worst symptoms of the cerebral disorder, from the earlier stages of which you are now suffering, is that the patient hears voices—or fancies that he hears them, which is pretty much the same thing. Sometimes they are strange voices; sometimes they are the voices of relatives, or friends no longer among the living. In short, to state the case as briefly as possible, the patient is haunted."

"I declare, Mr. Bristow, that you quite frighten me!"

"But there are no such symptoms as these about you at present, Mrs. McDermot. The moment you have the least experience of them—should such a misfortune ever overtake you—then take my advice, and seek the only remedy that can be of any real benefit to you."

"And what may that be?"

"Immediate change of scene—a change total and complete. Go abroad. Go to Italy; go to Egypt; go to Africa;—in short, to any place

where the change is a radical one. But I hope that, in your case, such a necessity will never arise."

"All this is most deeply interesting to me, Mr. Bristow, but at the same time it makes me very nervous. The very thought of being haunted in the way you mention is enough to keep me from sleeping for a week."

At this moment Jane came into the room, and a few minutes later the Squire awoke. Tom had said all that he wanted to say, and he gave Mrs. McDermot no further opportunity for private conversation with him.

Next day, too, Tom carefully avoided the widow. His object was to afford her ample time to think over what he had said. That day the vicar and his wife dined at Pincote, and Tom became immersed in local politics with the Squire and the Parson. Mrs. McDermot was anxious and uneasy. That evening she talked less than she had ever been known to do before.

The rule at Pincote was to keep early hours. It was not much past ten o'clock when Mrs. McDermot left the drawing-room, and having obtained her bed-candle, set out on her journey to her own room. Half way up the staircase stood Mr. Bristow. The night being warm and balmy for the time of year, the staircase window was still half open, and Tom stood there, gazing out into the moonlit garden. Mrs. McDermot stopped, and said a few gracious words to him. She would have liked to resume the conversation of the previous evening, but that was evidently neither the time nor the place to do so; so she said good night, shook hands, and went on her way, leaving Tom still standing by the window. Higher up, close to the head of the stairs, stood a very large, old-fashioned case clock. Mrs. McDermot held up her candle to see the time as she was passing it. It was nearly twenty minutes past ten. But at the very moment of her noting this fact, there came three distinct taps from the inside of the case, and next instant from the same place came the sound of a hollow, ghost-like voice. "Fanny—Fanny—list! I want to speak to you," said the voice, in slow, solemn tones. But Mrs. McDermot did not wait to hear more. She screamed, dropped her candle, and staggered back against the opposite wall. Tom was by her side in a moment.

"My dear Mrs. McDermot, whatever is the matter?" he said.

"The voice! did you not hear the voice?" she gasped.

"What voice? whose voice?" said Tom, with an arm round her waist.

"A voice which spoke to me out of the clock!" she said, with a shiver.

"Out of the clock?" said Tom. "We can soon see whether anybody's hidden there." Speaking thus, he withdrew his arm and flung open the door of the clock. Enough light came from the lamp on the

stairs to show that the old case was empty of everything, save the weights, chains, and pendulum.

"Wherever else the voice may have come from, it is plain that it couldn't come from here," said Tom, as he proceeded to relight the widow's candle.

"It came from there, I'm quite certain. There were three distinct raps from the inside as well."

"Is it not possible that it may have been a mere hallucination on your part? You have not been well, you know, for some time past."

"Whatever it may have been, it was very terrible," said Mrs. McDermot, drawing her skirts round her with a shudder. "I have not forgotten what you told me yesterday."

"Allow me to accompany you as far as your room door," said Tom.

"Thanks. I shall feel obliged by your doing so. You will say nothing of all this down stairs?"

"I should not think of doing so."

The following day Mr. Bristow was not at luncheon. There were one or two inquiries, but no one seemed to know exactly what had become of him. It was Mrs. McDermot's usual practice to retire to the library for an hour after luncheon—which room she generally had all to herself at such times—for the ostensible purpose of reading the newspapers, but, it may be, quite as much for the sake of a quiet sleep in the huge leathern chair that stood by the library fire. On going there as usual after luncheon to-day, what was the widow's surprise to find Mr. Bristow sitting there fast asleep, with the *Times* at his feet where it had dropped from his relaxed fingers.

She stepped up to him on tiptoe and looked closely at him. "Rather nice-looking," she said to herself. "Shall I disturb him, or not?"

Her eyes caught sight of some written documents lying out-spread on the table a little distance away. The temptation was too much for her. Still on tip-toe, she crossed to the table in order to examine them. But hardly had she stooped over the table when the same hollow voice that had sounded in her ears the previous night spoke to her again, and froze her to the spot where she was standing. "Fanny McDermot, you must get away from this house," said the voice. "If you stop here you will be a dead woman in three months!"

She was too terrified to look round or even to stir, but her trembling lips did at last falter out the words: "Who are you?"

The answer came. "I am your husband, Geoffrey. Be warned in time."

Then there was silence, and in a minute or two the widow ventured to look round. There was no one there except Mr. Bristow, fast asleep. She managed to reach the door without disturbing him, and from thence made the best of her way to her own room.

Two hours later Tom was encountered by the Squire. The latter

was one broad smile. "She's going at last," he said. "Off to-morrow like a shot. Just told me."

"Then, with your permission, I won't dine with you this evening. I don't want to see her again."

"But how on earth have you managed it?" asked the Squire.

"By means of a little simple ventriloquism—nothing more. But I see her coming this way. I'm off." And off he went, leaving the Squire staring after him in open-mouthed astonishment.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DIRTY JACK.

THERE was one thing that puzzled both General St. George and Lionel Dering, and that was the persistent way in which Kester St. George stayed on at Park Newton. It had, in the first place, been a matter of some difficulty to get him to Park Newton at all, and for some time after his arrival it had been evident to all concerned that he had made up his mind that his stay there should be as brief as possible. But after that never-to-be-forgotten night when the noise of ghostly footsteps was heard in the nailed-up room—a circumstance which both his uncle and his cousin had made up their minds would drive him from the house for ever—he ceased to talk much about going away. Week passed after week and still he stayed on. Nor could his uncle, had he been desirous of doing so, which he certainly was not, have hinted to him, even in the most delicate possible way, that his room would be more welcome than his company, after the pressure which he had put upon him only a short time previously to induce him to remain.

Nothing could have suited Lionel's plans better than that his cousin should continue to live on at Park Newton, but he was certainly puzzled to know what his reason could be for so doing; and, in such a case, to be puzzled was, to a certain extent, to be disquieted.

But much as he would have liked to do so, Kester had a very good reason for not leaving Park Newton at present. He was, in fact, afraid to do so. After the affair of the footsteps he had decided that it would not be advisable to go away for a little while. It would never do for people to say that he had been driven away by the ghost of Percy Osmond. It was while thus lingering on from day to day that he had ridden over to see Mother Mim. One result of his interview was that he felt how utterly unsafe it would be for him to quit the neighbourhood till she was safely dead and buried. She might send for him at any moment, she might have other things to speak to him about which it behoved him to hear. She might change her mind at the last moment, and decide to tell to some other person what she had already told

him; and when she should die, it would doubtless be to him that application would be made to bury her. All things considered, it was certainly unadvisable that he should leave Park Newton yet awhile.

Day after day he waited with smothered impatience for some further tidings of Mother Mim. But day after day he waited in vain. Most men under such circumstances would have gone to the place and have made personal enquiries for themselves. This was precisely what Kester St. George told himself that he ought to do, but for all that he did not do it. He shrank, with a repugnance which he could not overcome, from the thought of any further contact with either Mother Mim or her surroundings. His tastes, if not refined, were fastidious, and a shudder of disgust ran through him as often as he remembered that if what Mother Mim had said were true—and there was something that rang terribly like truth in her words—then was she—that wretched creature—his mother, and the filthy hut in which she lay dying his sole home and heritage. He knew that for the sake of his own interest—of his own safety—he ought to go and see again this woman who called herself his mother, but three weeks had come and gone before he could screw his courage up to the pitch requisite to induce him to do so.

But before this came about, Kester St. George had been left for the time being, with the exception of certain servants, the sole occupant of Park Newton. Lionel Dering had gone down to Bath to seek an interview with Pierre Janvard, with what result has been already seen. Two days after Lionel's departure, General St. George was called away by the sudden illness of an old Indian friend to whom he was most warmly attached. He left home expecting to be back in four or five days at the latest; whereas, as it fell out, he did not reach home again for several weeks.

It was one day when thus left alone, and when the solitude was becoming utterly intolerable to him, that Kester made up his mind that he would no longer be a coward, but would go that very afternoon and see for himself whether Mother Mim were alive or dead. But even after he had thus determined that there should be no more delay on his part, he played fast and loose with himself as to whether he should go or not. Had there come to him any important letter or telegram demanding his presence fifty miles away, he would have caught at it as a drowning man catches at a straw. The veriest excuse would have sufficed for the putting off of his journey for at least one day. But the dull hours wore themselves away without relief or change of any kind for him, and when three o'clock came, having first dosed himself heavily with brandy, he rang the bell and ordered his horse to be brought round. What might not the next few hours bring to him? he asked himself as he rode down the avenue. They might perchance be pregnant with doom. Or death might already have lifted this

last bitter burden from his life by sealing with his bony fingers the only lips that had power to do him harm.

For nearly a fortnight past the weather had been remarkably mild, balmy, and open for the time of year. Everybody said how easily old winter was dying. But during the previous night there had come a bitter change. The wind had suddenly veered round to the north-east, and was still blowing steadily from that quarter. Steadily and bitterly it blew, chilling the hearts of man and beast with its icy breath, stopping the growth of grass and flowers, killing every faintest gleam of sunshine, and bringing back the reign of winter in its cruellest form.

Heavy and lowering looked the sky, shrilly through the still bare branches whistled the ice-cold wind, as Kester St. George, deep in thought, rode slowly through the park. He buttoned his coat more closely around him, and pulled his hat more firmly over his brows as he turned out of the lodge gates, and setting his face full to the wind, urged his horse into a gallop, and was quickly lost to view down the winding road.

It would not have taken him long to reach the edge of Burley Moor had not his horse suddenly fallen lame. For the last two miles of the distance his pace was reduced to a slow walk. This so annoyed Kester that he decided to leave his horse at the road-side tavern in the last hamlet he had to pass through, and to traverse the remainder of the distance on foot. A short three miles across the moor would take him to Mother Mim's cottage.

To a man such as Kester a three miles' walk was a rather formidable undertaking—or, at least, it was an uncommon one. But there was no avoiding it on the present occasion, unless he gave up the object of his journey and went back home. But he could by no means bear the thought of doing that. In proportion with the hesitation and reluctance which he had previously shown to ascertain either the best or the worst of the affair, was the anxiety which now possessed him to reach his journey's end. His imagination pictured all kinds of possible and impossible evils as likely to accrue to him, and he cursed himself again and again for his negligence in not making the journey long ago.

Very bleak and cold was that walk across the desolate, lonely moor, but Kester St. George, buried in his own thoughts, hardly felt or heeded anything of it. All the sky was clouded and overcast, but far away to the north a still darker bank of cloud was creeping slowly up from the horizon.

The wind blew in hollow fitful gusts. Any one learned in such lore would have said that a change of weather was imminent.

When about half-way across the moor he halted for a moment to gather breath. On every side of him spread the dull treeless expanse.

Nowhere was there another human being to be seen. He was utterly alone. "If a man crossing here were suddenly stricken with death," he muttered to himself, "what a place this would be to die in! His body might lie here for days—for weeks even—before it was found."

At length Mother Mim's cottage was reached. Everything about it looked precisely the same as when he had seen it last. It seemed only like a few hours since he had left it. There, too, crouched on the low wall outside, with her skirt drawn over her head, was Mother Mim's grand-daughter, the girl with the black glittering eyes, looking as if she had never stirred from the spot since he was last there. She made no movement or sign of recognition when he walked up to her, but her eyes were full of a cold keen criticism of him, far beyond her age and appearance.

"How is your grandmother?" said Kester, abruptly. He did not like being stared at as she stared at him.

"She's dead."

"Dead!" It was no more than he expected to hear, and yet he could not hear it altogether unmoved.

"Aye, as dead as a door nail. And a good job too. It was time she went."

"How long has she been dead?" asked Kester, ignoring the latter part of the girl's speech.

"Just half an hour."

Another surprise for Kester. He had expected to hear that she had been dead several days—a week perhaps. But only half an hour!

"Who was with her when she died?" he asked, after a minute's pause.

"Me and Dirty Jack."

"Dirty Jack! who is he?"

"Why, Dirty Jack. Everybody knows him. He lives in Duxley, and has a wooden leg, and does writings for folk."

"Does writings for folk!" A shiver ran through Kester. "And has he been doing anything for your grandmother?"

"That he has. A lot."

"A lot—about what?"

"About you."

"About me? Why about me?"

"Oh, you never came near. Nobody never came near. Granny got tired of it. 'I'll have my revenge,' said she. So she sent for Dirty Jack, and he took it all down in writing."

"Took it all down in writing about me?"

She nodded her head in the affirmative.

"If you know so much, no doubt you know what it was that he took down—eh?"

"Oh, I know right enough."

"Why not tell me?"

"I know all about it, but I ain't a-going to split."

Further persuasion on Kester's part had no other effect than to induce the girl to assert in still more emphatic terms that "she wasn't a-going to split."

Evidently nothing more was to be got from her. But she had said enough already to confirm his worst fears. Mother Mim, out of spite for the neglect with which he had treated her, had made a confession at the last moment, similar in purport to what she had told him when last there. Such a confession—if not absolutely dangerous to him—she having assured him that none of the witnesses were now living—might be made a source of infinite annoyance to him. Such a story once made public might bring forth witnesses and evidence from twenty hitherto unsuspected quarters, and fetter him round, link by link, with a chain of evidence from which he might find it impossible to extricate himself. At every sacrifice, Mother Mim's Confession must be destroyed or suppressed. Such were some of the thoughts that passed through Kester's mind as he stood there biting his nails. Again and again he cursed himself in that he had allowed any such confession to emanate from the dead woman, whose silence a little extra kindness on his part would have effectually secured.

"And where is this Dirty Jack, as you call him?" he said, at last.

"He's in there"—indicating the hut with a jerk of her head—"fast asleep."

"Fast asleep in the same room with your grandmother!"

"Why not? He had a bottle of whiskey with him which he kept sucking at. At last he got half screwy, and when all was over he said he would have a snooze by the fire and pull himself together a bit before going home."

Kester said no more, but going up to the hut, opened the door and went in. On the pallet at the farther end lay the dead woman, her body faintly outlined through the sheet that had been drawn over her. A clear fire was burning in the broken grate, and close to it, on the only chair in the place, sat a man fast asleep. His hands were grimy, his linen was yellow, his hair was frowsy. He was a big bulky man, with a coarse, hard face, and was dressed in faded threadbare black. He had a wooden leg, which just now was thrust out towards the fire and seemed as if it were basking in the comfortable blaze.

On the chimney-piece was an empty spirit-bottle, and in a corner near at hand were deposited a broad-brimmed hat, greasy and much the worse for wear, and a formidable looking walking-stick.

Such was the vision of loveliness that met the gaze of Kester St. George as he paused for a moment or two just inside the cottage door. Then he coughed and advanced a step or two. As he did so the man suddenly opened his eyes, got up quick'y but awkwardly out of his chair, and laid his hand on something that was hidden in an inner

pocket of his coat. "No, you don't!" he cried, with a wave of his hand. "No, you don't! None of your hanky-panky tricks here. They won't go down with Jack Skeggs, so you needn't try 'em on!"

Kester stared at him in unconcealed disgust. It was evident that he was still under the partial influence of what he had been drinking.

"Who are you, sir, and what are you doing here?" asked Kester, sternly.

"I am John Skeggs, Esquire, attorney-at-law, at your service. And who may you be, sir? But there—I know who you are well enough. You are Mr. Kester St. George, of Park Newton. I have seen you before. I saw you on the day of the murder trial. You were one of the witnesses, and white enough you looked. Anybody who had a good look at you in the box that day would never be likely to forget your face again."

Kester turned aside for a moment to hide the sudden nervous twitching of his lips.

"I'm sorry the whiskey is done," said Mr. Skeggs, with a regretful look at the empty bottle. "I should like you and I to have had a dram together. I suppose you don't do anything in this line?" From one pocket he produced an old clasp-knife, and from the other a cake of leaf tobacco. Then he cut himself a plug and put it into his mouth. "When one friend fails me, then I fall back upon another," he said. "When I can't get whiskey I must have tobacco."

There was no better known character in Duxley than Mr. Skeggs. "Dirty Jack," or "Drunken Jack," were the soubriquets by which he was generally known, and neither of those terms was applied to him without good and sufficient reason. There could be no doubt as to the man's shrewdness, ability, and knowledge of common law. He was a great favourite among the lower and the very lowest classes of Duxley society, who in their legal difficulties never thought of employing any other lawyer than Skeggs, the universal belief being that if anybody could pull them through, either by hook or crook, Dirty Jack was that man. And it is quite possible that Mr. Skeggs's clients were not far wrong in their belief.

"No good stopping here any longer," said Skeggs, when he had put back his knife and tobacco into his pocket.

"No, I suppose not," said Kester.

"I suppose you will see that everything is done right and proper by our poor dear departed?"

"Yes, I suppose there is no one to look to but me. She was my foster-mother, and very kind to me when I was a lad."

"His foster-mother! Listen to that! His foster-mother! ha! ha!" sniggered Dirty Jack. Then laying a finger on one side his nose, and leering up at Kester with horrible familiarity, he added: "We know

all about that little affair, Mr. St. George, and a very pretty romance it is."

"Look you here, Mr. Skeggs, or whatever your dirty name may be," said Kester, sternly, "I'd advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head, or it may be worse for you. I've thrashed bigger men than you in my time. Be careful, or I shall thrash you."

"I like your pluck, on my soul I do!" said Skeggs, heartily. "If you're not genuine silver—and you know you ain't—you're a deuced-good imitation of the real thing. Thoroughly well plated, that's what you are. Anyone would take you to be a born gentleman, they would really. Which way are you going back?"

Kester hesitated a moment. Should he quarrel with this man and set him at defiance, or should he not? Could he afford to quarrel with him? that was the question. Perhaps it would be as well to keep from doing so as long as possible.

"I'm going to walk back across the moor as far as Sedgeley," said Kester.

"Then I'll walk with you—though three miles is rather a big stretch to do with my game leg. I can get a gig from there that will take me home."

Kester shrugged his shoulders, but made no comment. Skeggs took up his hat and stick, and proceeded to polish the former article with his sleeve.

"Queer woman that," he said, with a jerk of his thumb towards the bed—"very queer. Hard as nails. With something heroic about her, to my mind—something that under different circumstances might have developed her into a remarkable woman. Well, that's the way with heaps of us. Circumstances are dead against us, and we are not strong enough to overmaster them; else should we smite the world with a dim surprise, and genius would not be so scarce in the market as it is now."

Kester stared. Was this the half-drunken blackguard who had been jeering at him but two minutes ago? "And yet, drunk he must be," added Kester to himself. "No fellow in his senses would talk such precious rot."

"Your obedient, sir," said Skeggs, with a purposely exaggerated bow as he held open the door for Mr. St. George to pass out.

The girl was still sitting on the wall with her skirt drawn over her head. Kester went up to her. "I will send some one along first thing to-morrow morning to see to the funeral and other matters," he said, "if you can manage till then."

"Oh, I can manage right enough. Why not?" said the girl.

"I thought that perhaps you might not care to be in the house by yourself all night."

"Oh, I don't mind that."

"Then you are not afraid?"

"What's there to be frittened of? She's quiet enough now. I shall make up a jolly fire, and have a jolly supper, and then a jolly long sleep. And that's what I've not had for weeks. And I shall read the Dream Book. She can't keep that from me now. I know where it is. It's in the bed right under her. But I'll have it." She laughed and nodded her head, then putting a nut into her mouth she cracked it and began to pick out the kernel. Kester turned away.

"Nell, my good girl," said Mr. Skeggs, insinuatingly, "just see whether there is'n such a thing as a drop of whiskey somewhere about the house. I've an awful pain in my chest."

"There's no whiskey—not a drop—but I know where there's half a bottle of gin. Give me five shillings and I'll fetch it."

"Five shillings for half a bottle of gin! Why, Nell, what a greedy young pig you must be!"

"Don't have it, then. Nobody axed you. I can drink it myself."

"I'll give you three shillings for it. Come now."

"Not a meg less than five will I take," said Nell, emphatically, as she cracked another nut.

"Why, you young viper, have you no conscience at all?" he cried savagely. Then seeing that Nell took no further notice of him, he turned to Kester. "I find that I have no loose silver about me," he said. "Oblige me with the loan of a couple of half-crowns till we get to Sedgeley." Whenever Mr. Skeggs made a new acquaintance he always requested the loan of a couple of half-crowns before parting from him. But the half-crowns were never paid back until asked for, and asked for more than once.

A few premonitory flakes of snow were darkening the air as Kester St. George and Mr. Skeggs started on their way back across Burley Moor, the latter with a thick comforter round his neck and the bottle of gin stowed carefully away in the tail pocket of his coat. The cold seemed more intense than ever, but the wind had fallen altogether.

"We are going to have a rough night," said Skeggs as he stepped sturdily out. "We must contrive to get across the moor before the snow comes down very thick, or we shall stand a good chance of losing our way. Only the winter before last a pedlar and his wife were lost in the snow within a mile of here, and their bodies not found for a fortnight. This sudden change will play the devil with the young crops."

Kester did not answer. Far different matters occupied his thoughts. In silence they walked on for a little while.

"I suppose you could give a pretty good guess," said Skeggs at length, "at my reasons for asking you which way you were going to walk this afternoon?"

"Indeed, no," said Kester with a shrug. "I have not the remotest

idea, nor do I care to know. It was you who chose to accompany me. I did not thrust my company upon you."

Skeggs laughed a little maliciously. "I don't think there's much good, Mr. Kester St. George, in you and I beating about the bush. I'm a plain man of business, and that reminds me,"—interrupting himself with a chuckle—"that when I once used those very words to a client of mine, he retorted by saying, 'You are more than a plain man of business, Mr. Skeggs—you are an ugly one.' I did my very utmost for that man, but he was hanged. Mais revenons. I am a plain man of business, and I intend to deal with this question in a business-like way. The simple point is: What is it worth your while to give me for the document I have buttoned up here?" tapping his chest with his left hand as he spoke.

"I am at a loss to know to what document you refer," said Mr. St. George, coldly.

"A very few words will tell you the contents of it, though, if I am rightly informed, you can give a pretty good guess already as to what they are likely to be. In this document it is asserted that you, sir, have no right to the name by which the world has known you for so long a time—that you have no right to the position you occupy, to the property you claim as yours. That you are, in fact, none other than the son of Mother Mim herself—of the woman who lies dead in yonder hut."

Kester drew in his breath with something like a sigh. It was as he had feared. Mother Mim had told everything, and, of all people in the world, to the wretch now walking by his side. He braced his nerves for the coming encounter. "I have heard something before to-day of the rigmarole of which you speak," he said, haughtily; "but I need hardly tell you that the affair is nothing but a tissue of vilest lies from beginning to end."

"I daresay it is," said Skeggs, good humouredly. "But it may be rather difficult for you to prove that it is so."

"It will be still more difficult for you to prove that it is not so."

"Oh! I am quite aware of all the difficulties both for and against—no man more so. You have got possession, and a hundred other points in your favour. Still, with what evidence I have already, and what evidence I can get elsewhere, I should be able to make out a strong case—a very strong case against you in a court of justice."

"Evidence elsewhere!" said Kester, disdainfully. "There is no such thing, unless you are clever enough to make the dead speak."

"Even that has been done before now," said Skeggs, quietly. "But in this case we have no need to go to the churchyard to collect our evidence. I have a living, breathing witness whom I can lay my hands on at a day's notice."

"You lie," said Kester, emphatically.

"I'll wash that down," said Skeggs, halting for a moment and proceeding to take a good pull at his bottle of gin. "If you so far forget yourself again, I shall begin to feel sure that you are not a St. George. What I told you was not a lie. There were four witnesses who had all a personal knowledge of a certain fact. Three of those witnesses are dead: the fourth still lives. Of the existence of this fourth witness Mother Mim never gave a hint to you. It was her trump card, and she was far too cunning to let you see it."

Kester walked on in silence. He felt that just then he had hardly a word to say. Was all that he had sacrificed so much for in other ways, all that he had run such tremendous risks for, to be torn from him by the machinations of a vile old hag, and the drunken, ribald scoundrel by his side? Through what strange ambuses, through what dusky by-paths, doth Fate oft-times overtake us! We look back along the broad highway we have been traversing, and seeing no black shadow dogging our footsteps, we go rejoicing on our way; when suddenly, from some near-at-hand shrub, is shot a poisoned arrow, and the sunlight fades from our eyes for ever.

"And now, after this little skirmish," said Skeggs, "we come back to my first question: What can you afford to give me for the document in my pocket?"

"Suppose I say that I will give you nothing—what then?" said Kester, sullenly.

"Then I shall get my evidence together, work out my case on paper, and submit it to the heir-at-law."

"And supposing the heir-at-law, acting under advice, were to decline having anything to do with your case, as you call it?"

"He would be a fool to do that, because my case is anything but a weak one. I tell you this in confidence. But supposing he were to decline, then I should say to him: 'I am willing to conduct this case on my own account. If I fail, it shall not cost you a penny. If I succeed, you shall pay all expenses, and give me five thousand pounds.' That would fetch him, I think."

"You have been assuming all along," said Kester, "that your case is based on fact. I assure you that it is not—that it is nothing but a devilish lie from beginning to end."

"Really, my dear sir, that has little or nothing to do with the matter. I daresay it is a lie. But it is my place to believe it to be the truth, and to make other people believe the same as I do. Here's your very good health, sir." Again Mr. Skeggs took a long pull and a strong pull at his bottle of gin.

"Knowing what you know," said Kester, "and believing what you believe, are you yet willing to sell the document now in your possession?"

"Of course I am. What else is all this jaw for?"

"And don't you think you are a pretty sort of scoundrel to make me any such offer? Don't you think ——"

"Now look you here, Mr. St. George—if that is your name, which I very much doubt—don't let you and I begin to fling mud at one another, because that is a game at which I could lick you into fits. I have made you a fair offer. If we can't come to terms, there's no reason why we shouldn't part friendly."

Once again Kester walked on in silence. The snow had been coming down more thickly for some time past, and already the dull grey moor began to look strange and unfamiliar, but neither of the two men gave more than a passing thought to the weather.

"If you feel and know your case to be such a strong one," said Kester, at last, "why do you come to me at all? Why send a white flag into your enemy's camp! Why not fight him à l'outrance at once?"

"Because I'm neither so young nor so pugnacious as I once was," answered Skeggs. "I go in for peace and quiet now-a-days. I don't want the bother and annoyance of a law-suit. I have no ill-feeling towards you, and if you will only make me a fair offer, I shall be the last man in the world to disturb you in any way. Gemini! how the snow comes down! We are only about half way yet. We shall have some difficulty in picking our road across."

"I myself am as anxious as you can be, Mr. Skeggs, to be saved the trouble and annoyance of a law-suit, however sure I may feel that the result would be in my favour. But you must give me a little time to think this matter over. It is far too important to be decided at a moment's notice."

"Time? To be sure. You can make up your mind in about a couple of days, I suppose. Shall I call upon you, or will you call upon me?"

Hardly were the words out of Mr. Skeggs's mouth when his wooden leg sunk suddenly into a hidden hole in the pathway. Thrown forward by the shock, the lawyer came heavily to the ground, and at the same moment his leg snapped short off just below the knee.

Kester took him by the shoulders and assisted him to assume a sitting posture on the footpath.

Mr. Skeggs's first action was to pick up his broken limb and look at it with a sort of comical despair. "There goes a friend that has done me good service," he said; "but he might have lasted till he got me home, for all that. How the deuce am I to get home?" he asked, turning abruptly to Kester.

Kester paused for a minute and looked round before answering. The snow was coming down faster than ever. The moor was being gradually turned into a huge white carpet. Already its zig-zag paths and winding footways were barely distinguishable from the treacherous bog which lay on every side of them. In an hour and a half it would

be dark with a darkness that would be unrelieved by either moon or stars. If it kept on snowing all night at this rate the drift would be a couple of feet deep by morning. Skeggs's casual remark about the pedlar and his wife, unheeded at the time, now flashed vividly across Kester's mind.

"You will have to wait here till I can get assistance," he said, in answer to his companion's question. "There is no help for it."

"I suppose not," growled Skeggs. "Was ever anything so cursedly unfortunate?"

"Sedgeley is the nearest place to this," said Kester. "There are plenty of men there who know the moor thoroughly. I will send half a dozen of them to your help."

"How soon may I expect them here?"

"In about three quarters of an hour from now."

"Ugh! I'm half frozen now. What shall I be in another hour?"

"Oh, you'll pull through that easily enough. Your bottle is not empty yet."

"Jove! I'd forgotten the bottle," said Skeggs, with animation.

He took it out of his pocket and held it up to the light. "Not more than a quartern left. Well, that's better than none at all."

"Good-bye," said Kester as he shook some of the snow off his hat. "You may look for help in less than an hour."

"Good-bye, Mr. St. George," said Skeggs, looking very earnestly at him as he did so. "You won't forget to send the help, will you? because if you do forget, it will be nothing more nor less than wilful murder."

Kester laughed a short grating laugh. "Fear nothing, Skeggs," he said. "I won't forget. About that other trifle, I will write you in two or three days. Again, good-bye."

Skeggs's face had turned very white. He could not speak. He took off his hat and waved it. Kester responded by a wave of his hand. Then turning on his heel he strode away through the snowy twilight. In three minutes he was lost to sight. Skeggs could no longer see him. Tears came into his eyes. "He'll send no help, not he. I shall die here like a dog. The snow will be my winding-sheet. If ever there was mischief in a man's eye, there was in his as he bade me good-bye."

Onward strode Kester St. George through the blinding snow. Altogether heedless of the weather was he just now. He had other things to think about. As instinctively as an Indian or a backwoodsman tracks his way across prairie or forest did he track his way across the moor, all hidden though the paths now were. He was a child of the moor. He had learned its secrets when a boy, and in his present emergency, reason and intellect must perforce give way to that blind instinct which was left him as a legacy of his youth.

At length the last patch of moorland was crossed, and a few minutes later he found himself close by a well-remembered finger-post where three roads met. One of these roads led to Sedgeley, which was but a short quarter of a mile away; another of them led to Duxley and Park Newton. At Sedgeley his horse was waiting for him. There, too, was to be had the help which he had so faithfully promised Skeggs that he would send. Leaning against the finger-post, he took a minute's rest before going any further. Which road should he take? That was the question which at present he was turning over and over in his mind. Not long did he hesitate. Taking out his pocket-handkerchief, he made a wisp of it and tied it round his throat. Then he turned up the collar of his coat. Then once again he shook the snow off his hat. Then plunging his hands deep in his pockets, and turning his back on the finger-post, he set out resolutely along the road that led towards Park Newton. Once, and once only, did he pause, even for a moment, before reaching home. It was when he fancied that he heard, away in the far distance, a low, wild, melancholy cry—whether the cry of an animal or a man he could not tell—but none the less a cry for help. Whatever it was, it did not come again, and after that Kester pursued his way homeward steadily and without pause. It was quite dark long before he reached his own room.

He changed his clothes and went down to dinner. Both his uncle and Richard Dering were away, and he dined alone, for which he was by no means sorry. Every half-hour or so he inquired as to the weather. They had nothing to tell him except that it was still snowing hard. The evening was one of slow torture, but at length it wore itself away. He went to bed about midnight. Dobbs's last report to him was that the weather was still unchanged. But several times during the night Dobbs heard his master pacing up and down his room, and had he been there he might, ever and again, have seen a haggard face peering out with eager eyes into the darkness.

"Twelve inches of snow, sir, on the drive," was Dobbs's first news next morning. "They say there has not been a fall like it in these parts for a dozen years."

The snow had ceased to fall hours before. By-and-by there came a few gleams of sunshine to brighten the scene, but the wind was still in the north, and all that day the weather kept bitterly cold. Soon after sunset, however, there was a change. Little by little the wind got round to the south-west. At ten o'clock Dobbs reported: "Snow going fast, sir. Regular thaw. Not be a bit left by breakfast time."

"Call me at four," said his master, "and have some coffee ready, and a horse brought round by 4.30."

He was quite tired out by this time, and when he went to bed he felt sure that he should have four or five hours' sound sleep. But his sleep was several times disturbed by a strange dream: always the same

thing repeated over and over again. He dreamt that he was standing under the finger-post on the edge of the moor. But the finger-post was neither more nor less than a gigantic skeleton, of which the outstretched arms formed the direction boards. On the bony palm of one outstretched arm, in letters of blood, was written the words: "To Sedgeley." Then as he read the words in his dream, again would sound in his ears the low, weird, melancholy cry which had arrested his steps for a moment as he walked home through the snow, and hearing the cry he would start up in bed and stare round him, and wonder for a moment where he was.

Dobbs duly called his master at four, and at 4.30 he mounted his horse and rode away. The roads were heavy and sloppy with the melting snow. The morning was intensely dark, but Kester knew the country thoroughly, and was never at a loss as to which turn he ought to take. Not one human being did he meet during the whole of his ride. But, indeed, his nearest friend would have passed him by in the dark without recognition. He wore an old shooting-suit, with a Glengarry bonnet and a macintosh, and had a thick shawl wrapped round his throat and the lower part of his face.

Day was just breaking as he reached the edge of the moor. He tethered his horse to the stump of an old tree behind a hedge. He had brought a powerful field-glass in his pocket. He scanned the moor carefully through it before proceeding farther on his quest. No living being was in sight anywhere. Satisfied of this, he set out without further delay, leaving his horse by itself to await his return. Not without a tremor—not without a faster beating of the heart—did he again set foot on the moor. A drizzling rain now began to fall, but Kester was not sorry for this. The worse the weather, the fewer the people who would be abroad in it. Onward he strode, keeping a wary eye about him as he went.

At length he reached a curve in the path from whence he ought to be able to discern the bulky form of John Skeggs, Esq., if that gentleman was still where he had last seen him. He looked, but the morning was still heavy and dark: he could see nothing. Then he adjusted his glass, and looking through that he could just make out a heap—a bundle—a shapeless something. It required a powerful effort on his part to brace his nerves to the pitch requisite to carry him through the task he had still before him. He had filled a small flask with brandy, and he now drank some of it. Then he started again. A few minutes more and the end of his journey was reached.

There lay Skeggs, on the very spot where he had left him, resting on his side, with one hand under his head, as if asleep. His hat had fallen off. On the ground near him were the empty bottle, his walking-stick, and his broken wooden leg. Numb by the intense cold, he had fallen asleep while waiting for the help which was never to come, and had so

died, frozen to death. Doubtless his death had been a painless one, but none the less, as he himself would have said, was Kester St. George his murderer.

Gloved though he was, it was not without a feeling of indescribable loathing that Kester could bring himself to touch the body. But it was absolutely necessary to do so. The paper he had come in quest of was in the breast pocket of the dead man's coat. It did not take him long to find it. Having made sure that he had got the right document, he fastened it up in the breast pocket of his own coat. "Now I am safe!" he said to himself. Then he took off his gloves and buried them carefully under a large stone. Then with one last glance at the body, he slunk hurriedly away, cursing in his heart the daylight that was now creeping up so rapidly from the east. In the clear light of dawn the foul deed he had done looked a thousand times fouler than it had looked before.

(To be concluded.)

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THE MAGNOLIA.

STAINLESS white petals !

Corolla of snow !

Gold in the centre,

All richness and glow :

Bath for Titania

Of crystalline dew,

Couch to lull Oberon

Under the blue.

Cradle for humming-bird !

Butterfly's nest !

Fountain of nectar

For honey-bees' quest !

Goblet for Ganymede,

Full of the wine

Brewed by Aurora

With fingers divine !

Chalice of spicery,

Fit for a queen !

Crowning a column

Of exquisite green :

Cup to be held in

The hand of a bride,

Pure as thy perfume,

An emperor's pride !

Flower to be laid on

The cross by a tomb !

Type of the spirit

In Paradise—bloom !

Therefore I gather thee,

Lovely and pure ;

Speak from this graveyard

Of joys that endure !

JANE DIXON.

IRISH CONVENT LIFE.

By the Author of "Polly."

ACCORDING to the ideas of the multitude, there is always a certain halo of romance surrounding the monastic or conventual life : and yet, in reality, the existence we all lead, who mix freely with the world, has in it far less of the commonplace.

Of course, when the heart of a nun is devoted wholly to God, when she lives to please Him alone, her motives glorify and make sublime any round of duties ; but where this is not the case, we know that the monotonous succession of tasks which falls to the lot of the Sisters continually proves wearisome and almost unendurable.

When a novice has outlived the strangeness of her position, she many times longs for the variety of what we call every-day and stupid life ; just as some discontented members of a family may sigh after the seclusion of what is popularly termed a religious life. The unknown and untried is often thought to have more charms than it really has.

There are very many monks and nuns in Ireland ; and here, as in France, the convents are, for the most part, educational establishments. In some lonely country districts, where but few advantages are to be had in the way of instruction, Protestant gentry are glad to avail themselves of these Romish schools for their children, although the teaching given is, in many cases, far from first-rate.

It is in beautiful, delicate needlework, and in the making of lace of different kinds, that the Irish Sisters excel. There are several houses in the South, each of which is famous for some special kind of manufacture. Persons who are learned in such matters can tell instantly, on looking at a piece of work, at what convent it was done. The crochet made under the superintendence of the Youghal nuns is exquisite, and so fine that it has, in many cases, been mistaken for other kinds of lace. I have heard of a lady who purchased a quantity of what she believed to be old Roman point, in Italy, at a great expense. On bringing it home she took it to her dressmaker, in Dublin, and gave it to her as trimming for a dress, with many cautions against waste, and with repeated orders not to cut it unnecessarily. The woman smiled when she heard the discoloured work called antique point. She got a magnifying-glass, and showed her customer that she had, in reality, bought Irish crochet lace, which had been dipped in some yellowing fluid, in order to give it an appearance of great age. This clever expert was, moreover, able to tell from what part of the country it had originally been procured. Some ladies are very fond of purchasing sleeves and collars of this beautiful work, to wear at the table d'hôte when travelling on the Continent, as it does not require

what is technically termed doing up : when soiled, simple washing and drying will restore it to its pristine daintiness. Besides this, it is quite uninjured by any amount of pressing or crumpling.

There are nuns of many different orders in Ireland. It is the duty of some of these recluses to confine themselves strictly and perpetually within the convent limits : others go about, at times, in couples, closely veiled, for the purpose of ministering to the poor and sick. Their black uniform and absorbed, retiring demeanour always insure a certain amount of interest and respectful admiration from those with whom they come in contact. Although, apparently, blind to all that goes on around them as they pass through the streets, they are ever ready to do an act of kindness. They will pause to comfort a crying child, or to lift a fallen cripple from the ground. When amongst the destitute, they are bound not to shrink from the performance of any office of mercy which offers itself, however painful or disagreeable the task may be.

Protestant nursing sisterhoods are now established in different parts of Ireland, but, where this is not the case, the Romish sœurs can always be had in times of need. The power of securing the presence of one of these in a sick chamber is, on many occasions, an inestimable boon.

The Sisters are not allowed to receive any payment themselves for their services, but a guinea a week is generally charged for their attendance in a family by the Mother Superior of their house, to whom all dues must be paid personally.

The lay Sisters are, generally speaking, persons belonging to the lower classes of society. When a Roman Catholic woman feels what is called a vocation for the religious life, without having means sufficient to enable her to enter a convent as an ordinary nun, she goes in as a subordinate, under the obligation of acting as a servant in the establishment.

I have been told that in Ireland no lady can become a religieuse, and retain her original position, unless she is possessed of property to the value of, at least, £30 a year, which becomes the property of the house she joins as a member.

I have thought that an account of a visit paid by me to a convent in the quaint old town of K—— might interest readers ; but before entering on the narration, I will tell how a nun of the Order of the Visitation takes her irrevocable vows upon her.

As she stands before the celebrant, he says to her, " My sister, thou art dead to thyself and to the world ; henceforth live only to God."

The other nuns then sing, " Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord " ; and the newly professed sister lies down and is covered with a pall. A nun reads a lesson from the book of Job, and the " De profundis " is chanted. After a prayer the priest sprinkles the pall with holy water, saying, " Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the

dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The girl rises, and takes from him a taper, upon which he says, "The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Then the others sing the words, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

After another prayer the celebrant gives^s the newly professed a crucifix, saying, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ which is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." He adds the caution, "God forbid that ye should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There are, of course, many other ceremonies gone through on such occasions, but the above gives at least an idea of the sad, solemn and impressive scene.

While staying at K—— I was very anxious to inspect the convent there; but it is not at all easy to gain admittance to a nunnery; and so many difficulties offered themselves that I had almost despaired of success, when at last, through the agency of a Roman Catholic acquaintance, who was to accompany us, I and a few friends received the much desired carte of permission to visit the house.

When we presented ourselves at the entrance door we found that it was provided with no knocker or bell. A child almost immediately opened it to us, however. She was one of a number of orphans maintained and educated by the convent. She was dressed in a sort of uniform, and wore a small frilled white cap upon her head. We were shown through a vestibule, into a reception-room.

Here, as elsewhere throughout the building, the floor was uncarpeted and highly polished, while the pure and freshly-painted walls were ornamented with texts of Scripture and prints of lovely pictures, principally, but not exclusively, on sacred subjects. An illustrated copy of the English New Testament lay on a table in the centre of this chamber. A number of foreign copies of the same book, translated into many different languages, were also here, having been presented to the establishment by different ecclesiastics, probably on the occasion of their having visited the house. There were folding-doors at one side of the apartment, and near these were placed two lovely statues, one of the blessed Virgin ; the other, doubtless, of St. Joseph.

We were kept waiting some little time, and I had just turned to examine and admire these, when, on a sudden, the Lady Abbess appeared before us. She was a plump, merry-faced, and yet dignified looking woman, and was dressed entirely in black, wearing a robe which swept behind her in a train that seemed to be yards long. Behind her, with subdued and reverent mien, walked a lovely young nun, whom the Mother Superior introduced to us as the Lady Mary Agnese, and to whose charge and ciceroneship she consigned us. "Keep close together,

ladies," laughed the mistress of the house. "I know that Protestants are terribly afraid of being locked up in some of our cells, and of never being released again."

We smiled and bowed as we followed our conductress. She led us up a wide, handsome staircase, adorned, here and there, by statues, placed in niches prepared in the wall for their reception, and by scrolls, appropriate to the subjects represented, painted overhead. Two lay Sisters stood aside to let us pass. Their duty, for the time, consisted in clanging a bell incessantly. As they rang they summoned some particular nun, according to the number of strokes sounded, to do some special task allotted to her. We asked our guide how many recluses lived here, but she said she did not know. "I should at least have to count them up one by one, to be able to answer you correctly," she observed quietly. The cells or sleeping apartments in this part of the house all opened off a long, pleasant, airy and sunshiny corridor or lobby. Each of them contained a small bed draped with green hangings, a table, chair and crucifix. We were not allowed to enter any of these, being only permitted to stand outside and look in.

We were taken, afterwards, into the Novitiate. This was a beautiful room, full of sunbeams and freshness. A long covered table ran up nearly the whole length of the chamber, and on it stood very many desks. Two of these were occupied, one by a girl wearing a white veil, the other by a lady whose face was shrouded from us by a black covering. We lingered here for some time, but neither of them looked up, even for an instant, nor did they by any motion betray consciousness of our presence. Both were writing busily, the novice being employed, as we saw, in copying some old manuscript.

We then turned into a more spacious saloon. It was beautifully, tastefully, and artistically furnished, and a long wide balcony stretched before the windows and overlooked the garden, in which two black-robed figures were promenading, reading as they walked in the shade of some tall trees. The nuns' burial-ground, with its stone crosses, was pointed out to us, and we were shown a couple of green fields, which we were informed belonged also to the convent. Within the limits of this small demesne alone might the Sisters take exercise, except on those occasions when they were sent on errands of mercy.

After this we went through several school-rooms. In the first of these, where needlework only was the order of the day, a naughty child had been made to stand on a pedestal in a corner, with her head enveloped in a large paper bag, as a punishment for some breach of discipline. Visitors did not come to the house every day, and this little girl was so very anxious to catch a glimpse of the strange faces that she tore a hole in her mask, and peeped out at us through it. It was only courteous to make some small purchase here, and I therefore bought a lace collar. Fortunately for the demand made on my purse,

this nunnery was not one of those where the far-famed Irish point is manufactured. This beautiful work is extravagantly dear, the buyers having to pay for the eyes of the girls employed, who continually become blind from the excessive fineness of the materials used and of the stitches put in.

The most interesting school-room visited by us on this occasion was that in which a number of infants were assembled. Some of the wee dots were endeavouring to be very good and solemn over their lessons, while others were dropping off fast asleep ; and, as this happened, they were tenderly gathered up by a watchful Sister, and were laid upon a large bed, settled for them all in one corner of the chamber.

Lady Mary Agnese went with us all over the establishment, and finally led us to the door of the convent chapel. Here she paused and crossed herself. One of the nuns was playing a soft voluntary above in the organ-loft, and in the distant dusky choir a swinging lamp was burning before the altar. We asked leave to enter, and our guide said there was no objection to our doing so, provided only that we behaved reverently, and kept silence. Our Roman Catholic friend had, however, hurried on before, and was now calling for us to follow. She talked loudly as she pointed out the sanctuary's tawdry adornments, which she admired, but which we secretly lamented over, as subtracting from that simple beauty and dignity which we Protestants love to see in a building devoted to God. The Roman Catholic people of K—— were free to worship here, but a beautifully carved screen at one side of the chancel partitioned off a sort of inner chamber, or chapel, fitted up for the use of the inhabitants of the convent, who knelt within this division during the celebration of the mass.

I think I have told nearly all that I can now recall of my visit to K—— Nunnery. The lady who accompanied us about the house had a refined and most attractive face. Her appearance was far more winning than that of the other Sisters, with whom we came in contact. Some of the nuns looked very sad : a weary, heavy depression of spirit seemed upon them. Each wore a broad silver ring on the third finger of the left hand, and a rosary was suspended from every girdle.



MISS MILDON.

By HENRY KINGSLEY, Author of "Ravenshoe."

IN all the confusion of the inn at Bouillon, George Dickson could not help noticing that wherever he went one pair of eyes followed him, as if to gain his attention. He, however, said to himself, "You have a tongue, my French friend, and can speak if you choose," and then thought nothing more about the matter, but gazed on the extraordinary scene before him.

The end of the world seemed to have come ; people were eating on the floor, on the hearth-stone, on the beds, and on the billiard-table. They were eating indiscriminately everything they could get hold of, and drinking everything which was liquid. Some were still asleep where they had fallen down the night before ; others were scarcely yet awake ; some, drunk all night, were not yet sober, and some who had slept themselves sober, seemed inclined to get drunk again. There was a ghastly hilarity about the whole thing which disgusted George and made his two companions eagerly acquiesce in immediate departure.

"Let us get on, and get it over," he remarked, "anything is better than these excited boozing wretches."

Then the Frenchman who had watched George came up, and taking him aside said, in perfectly good English, "Sir, I am going to ask for a very great favour. Will you allow me to accompany you?"

"Really, sir," said George, "our expedition is none of the most pleasant or safe."

"Exactly ; but you have two passes, while I have actually no papers at all."

"I cannot recommend your going forward, sir."

"No. I should not recommend it myself. I only ask it as a favour. My sister is at school in the town, while yours, Mr. Dickson, is safe in London. Come, sir, go bail for me, and let me go on with you. If London was sacked, I would do the same by you."

"You seem to know me, sir," said George, very much surprised. "If you know much about me, you must be aware that I have trusted a stranger once too often in my life, and that I am not prepared to trust another."

"Don't say that," said the Frenchman. "I know that you are only here as newspaper correspondent. Because you trusted a Frenchman who was false to you, I will not be so. I pray you most earnestly to let me go to the front with you, and get news of my sister. Surely you cannot refuse."

"But, my dear sir, you might be a spy for anything I know," said George.

"Well, I am," was the startling reply, "but not here or in this matter. Had I been acting as a spy I should have had papers; as it is, I have none. I am only a Jesuit, and we are getting much the worst of it. I will swear to you that my only object in going to the front is to see after the safety of my sister. Come, your pass from Bernstorff is signed for yourself and one friend. Make me that friend. I am only a Jesuit."

George Dickson was one of those men who acted first and thought afterwards. He did so on this occasion, and began an acquaintance-ship which, by a curious series of accidents, brought him into more trouble than he calculated on.

"Come on," he said, "I will see you through it." His two friends, Markham of the Carabineers, and Marfie of the Bengal Staff Corps, were out in the road, calling for him. He ran into the street and joined them, followed by the young Frenchman. They stepped stoutly forward, carrying their little bags in their hands; but before they had got a hundred yards they were overtaken by a pale young man out of breath. There was no difficulty about allowing him to accompany them; he was the correspondent of the "*Indépendance Belge*," with papers enough to carry him to Persia, but wanting company because he had the most awful horror of what he was going to see.

What a delicious change it was from the hot, brutal, Belgian public-house to the clear morning air! Aloft in the mist was Godfrey of Bouillon's Castle; below them the Semois crawling over his shingle beds. George always said that it was the most delicious morning walk he ever had in his life. The five men passed on swiftly through the forest; the two English soldiers leading the way, with George and his new French friend bringing up the rear.

"You seem to know a great deal about me," said George.

"I do," was the answer. "My cousin, Aime Hebert, was at one time your friend. You were together at school at Dieppe. You knew him when he got older, and you trusted him. He deceived you—for a time—and you had to pay some money for him."

"One hundred and eighty pounds," said George Dickson, ruefully.

"Yes. I thought it was two hundred. I can get that all back for you. He will be able to pay soon, and he will pay. He is a very honest fellow."

"Is he a Jesuit?" asked George.

"A Jesuit! what are you thinking of? No, he is like myself, a Freemason."

"But you said you were a Jesuit," said George.

"I don't think I said that," said the Frenchman.

"You certainly did," said George.

"I am so worried that I do not know what I do say," said the young Frenchman. "What on earth could have induced me to say *that*?"

"I don't know," said George. "Do you know that I do not even know your name?"

"Delaval. Your mother was a Delaval, you know."

"That is certainly true. Do you claim relationship?"

"Not for worlds. I know nothing of you save this: you went security for your fellow-student, Aimé Hebert, who is my cousin. In consequence of his failing, you have to come here as a correspondent to a daily paper, immediately upon having been called to the bar. Hebert can pay now, and for your kindness to-day I will make him. In our society we have power which you do not dream of."

"The Jesuits *are* powerful," said George.

"I have told you once before that I was not a Jesuit," said Delaval.

"And once that you were," said George, laughing. "Well, we need not talk any more. You are something, and you do not choose to tell what. I shall find out some day or another."

"Yes, I suppose so. Meanwhile I have a great friendship for you and I should like it to be reciprocated. We might both of us do one another some good."

George Dickson had a good look at his man, and, sharp young lawyer as he was, could not make him out at all. He was very handsome, shaved like a Frenchman, with no hair on his face except the moustaches; and yet he did not look an entire Frenchman. He said that he was a spy, a Jesuit and a Freemason all in the same breath. What *was* he? He appeared to George Dickson something between a Greek and a Jew when he examined him more nearly. For the reader's satisfaction we may say that he was neither.

"You are a very agreeable companion," said George Dickson, "but to tell you the truth I am in no humour to talk business. What has happened is so ghastly and horrible that I can think of nothing except the awful misfortunes."

"Our people were not prepared for it," said Delaval. "See, your friends are calling us up." The two left off speaking and hurried after the officers and the Belgian war correspondent.

They had crossed the frontier for some time now. The road through the forest continued to be very beautiful, and the weather was heavenly. But in a turn of the road, at a place where the two officers had paused, there were the first signs of war. Eight dead horses, and a lumbering van standing across the road, on which some German wag had chalked "A Berlin."

Then they all walked together. The road still wound up the hill-side, above a flashing trout stream, seen far below them in the valley, through trembling leaves. Then there came a turn to the right, and they passed through the solitary street of La Chapelle.

The sight of La Chapelle was not reassuring. It was noticed that the two English officers talked more persistently and that the French-

man grew more silent. In the lanes beyond, they were all silent ; and when the real horrors began the Frenchman was missing.

Had the Belgian disappeared the matter was explicable. But that a gallant young Frenchman should be frightened at the sight of the most terrible slaughter which the world has ever seen, was inexplicable. Still, when they got in that awful potato field, the Frenchman was not there.

To describe the field of a great battle is almost impossible. The land seems to be ripped and torn in every direction, in some horrible, unnatural way. The brown earth is turned up in ghastly furrows under the withering trees. The only beautiful things left are the dead, who chequer the wasted land in groups. No one has ever made even a decent attempt at describing the reality : we pass the description of it by as being utterly beyond our powers.

George Dickson stood amongst the dead, and looked around him. The place must have been beautiful at one time, and later travellers have told us that it is once more beautified by nature, though to our eyes it will remain a horrible charnel-house until death. The 17th of the French Line lay in ruins, motionless except where they were being dragged to the trenches by German soldiers.

"Why does God allow such things?" he said aloud.

"There spoke a civilian," said the Bengal officer. "I bet you ten rupees that you see some nature ennobled by this horrible business before the day is over. What do you feel yourself?"

"I feel a terrible, inconceivable pity. I feel as if I could lay down my own life to mend this."

"Then hand me over ten rupees," said the Bengal officer. "For your nature has been ennobled. War is utterly evil, but God brings good out of it somehow. Look at that man : there is a woman on the field, looking at the dead men's faces."

"And there is that Frenchman, Delaval, with her," said George. "That must be his sister. He said she was in the town ; but he has told me more lies in one walk than I could believe in a twelvemonth."

"Really," said the Bengal officer. "And yet he does not look like a liar."

"No liar ever does, my dear soldier," said George. "If you were a lawyer you would know that."

There were about 180,000 German men in sight on their left, and they expected the retreating French would make some sign. But they made none.

How clearly one sees it ; a hot, trodden plain of clay, a brazen sky overhead, a town down below in the valley, and the French dead lying all round like faded tulips, cut and thrown down. A black figure managing the death pits, and a graceful girl, bending down and peering into every dead man's face.

"I found my sister at Fond de Givonne," said Delaval, approaching George. "She is looking for some one whose death might be important to you. Aimé Hebert."

"But you said he could pay me," said George, astonished.

"My dear sir, I required your assistance in getting on, and I forget what I told you. If any part of it was true, I must have been a great fool. My object was to deceive you. Do me the compliment to say that I succeeded, or I shall be extremely angry with you."

George felt extremely inclined to kick the man, but it was not a place for any demonstration of the kind. He said, "I never before knew a Frenchman tell such falsehoods as you have done, sir."

"But, my dear sir, I am not a Frenchman," said Delaval.

"Your sister, who is approaching us, can possibly speak the truth, sir."

"But she is not my sister," said Delaval.

She came towards them and raised her veil. In one instant the great passage in George Dickson's life was over. Amidst the horrible ruin and desolation he saw the only woman he had ever cared for; the woman he had so seldom seen in his life, but so many thousand times in his dreams.

Miss Milton, of Milfield Lane. No other person in the world. He had met her twice at parties in Highgate, and about there, and had fallen in love with her. He had also dared to walk with her in Milfield Lane, but she had been cold, almost rude to him. He had tried to forget her, but it had been useless. For the last time, as he believed, he had met her in Milfield Lane, and laid his love before her.

She told him the plain truth. All her people were French except her father, whose name she bore. She was fiancée to Aimé Hebert, and could not listen to him. He then committed an awful act of folly; he made the acquaintance of that young Frenchman, so that he might see her sometimes, even when another's arm was round her waist.

There are few who possess the powers of concentration which Heine had, who can give us a tragedy in a sonnet. We will, however, be as brief as we can. He followed Aimé Hebert about, and at last went security for him; a debt which Hebert neglected to pay, and which for a time nearly ruined George.

Who can tell what madness has been committed by men and women when they have seen the object of their love in another's possession? George habitually saw the only woman he loved receiving attentions from another man, for whom she did not seem to care very much. In the end it made him almost careless of his life.

He would not be rich before his father's death. His father was penurious and mean, keeping him poor, and telling him that he must make his own way in life. That does no man any harm if he can be got to believe it; and if George's father had stopped there all would have been well. But the old man thought that it would be a fine thing for George to

marry well. He proposed a match to him with a rich young lady, older than himself. She was very good, and he in a state of infuriated disappointment. George told her the lie that he loved her; he knew it to be a lie, but he told it. She believed him, and was greatly gratified. In the meantime, her father decided that they must wait for three years, and that he must make his way in the world.

So he went to the bar, and so naturally he went to literature; so he naturally came to the field of Sedan, that Aceldama of so many hopes; and so on that field he met his old, his only love, only to find that the chain of honour dragged him away from her for ever.

Would he not have changed places with the dead when she told him the truth; when she looked into his eyes with hers, and said softly, "This is a strange place to meet you, and this is a strange place for you to find me in. I was in the town the whole of the horrible day. The German soldiers were very kind to us, but the town was so horrible that I came out, and crept into a house at Fond de Givonne. I have come across the field where the 17th de la Ligne perished, because I wanted to see if I could recognize the body of one of my cousins."

"Your news is good," said George. "You looked coolly for the body of your lover."

"I do not understand you," she said. "You are as rude to me as I used to be to you; but in this ruin we must forget all. My nerve is good, because after the breach between myself and Aimé Hebert, who so grossly deceived you, I have entered a nursing sisterhood, and have become used to death in all forms. I have taken my first vows, and I shall take the veil in three months. My father sent Mr. Delaval after me; but I think among these kindly Germans I could have done without his assistance."

"Mr. Delaval said he was your brother."

"Mr. Delaval my brother!" she said. "Mr. Delaval is a Pole. I believe known to most police-courts in Europe. He is a splendid spy, and my father employed him, but could get him no papers; he is too well known. Are you married yet?"

"No, not yet."

"It is delicious to meet you here, after all. Look round at these poor innocent young men, lying so quiet: in the presence of death one seems to be always with God. We loved one another once: now your heart has gone to another human being, and mine is given to Heaven."

There are terrible moments in each man's or woman's life which will not bear repeating. What either of these two people would ever have said to one another can never be known now.

They stood looking at one another. Their interview had been short, but they had found out something in it: they had found that they cared for one another. Still, the man had cast away his life on the altar

of avarice, and the woman, as women will, had dedicated hers to religion.

Together, mutually helping one another, what might they be yet? What might their children be yet? They stood face to face, close to one another, knowing that it was their last interview. The laws of honour and of the world would take him from her; the laws of religion would take her from him. Around were the happy dead, with their feet turned up to the sky.

A loud sound of talking disturbed them. They retired into themselves. The Bengal officer came up and said: "One of these abominations of percussion shells is lying here unexploded. Come up, Dickson, and look at it."

She took his arm and went with him. One gentle pressure told him the truth. She loved him still.

Delaval, the Pole, had the shell in his hand. It was about nine inches long, and pointed. The German laboratory is not so good as the English; we are more clever in details. A comparatively large number of the German shells never burst, when fired at a low trajectory. A husbandman, while ploughing on the heights above Paris, long after the siege, was killed, with both his horses, by turning up one of them. Near where they stood were four young men lying with their heads together by the explosion of one of them, and, in all probability, five others, lying close by, were killed by the same shell. We only wish our readers to understand that these shells are terribly dangerous things, and that their time of explosion is by no means so ascertainable as could always be wished.

Delaval had the shell in his hand. As they advanced he was disengaging about it, and holding it aloft. "The percussion fuse in this one is gone wrong," he said. "See, I will throw it down among us, and you shall see that it will not explode."

Before anyone could stop the madman, he had done it. There was a great blue flame, and a sound totally different from the report of a cannon. A shattering, broken noise, then smoke, and an instant's silence. The Carabineer officer, the Bengal officer, the "Indépendance Belge," and Miss Milton were all unwounded. Delaval was prostrate, horribly injured about the head, and George Dickson had his left arm torn away, and was crying out for water.

There was a burying party near, across the road, composed mainly of the citizens of the town, who seemed to prefer this dreadful occupation to watching the ruins of their own homes. They came and helped the two wounded men; but a London doctor who was there said that there was no hope for either of them.

They carried them into Givonne, and laid them in a barn, in the straw, side by side. A Turco had to be moved to make room for them, and he cursed them by Allah, at first; but when the young lady, whom

we shall in future take the liberty of calling Elizabeth, gave him some water, he blessed as strongly as he had cursed.

The English doctor attended to George, and he tried to sleep ; but the man on the left of him was restless, and, in trying to soothe him, he found that it was Delaval, groaning heavily.

"Why, are you hurt too ?" said George. "I am so very sorry for that. What a fool you were to play with that shell."

"I did it on purpose," said Delaval. "I saw that she cared for you still. I wished to destroy you. Are *you* badly hurt ?"

"I am a miserable cripple for life," said George. "But God knows that I forgive you. Why did you do it ?"

"I tell you that I saw she cared for you. I love her, and she hates me. I wanted to kill you and her too. Is she dead ?"

"No, she was not injured," said George.

"I wish she was. But now that you are utterly ruined it does not so much matter. One comfort is that she will never look at you now."

"I wish that I had never set eyes on you," said George. "I think that I should have killed you, had I known the truth about you. I will not curse you, I am in need of mercy myself. I will heap my bitterest revenge on you. I entirely forgive you. There must have been something noble in your nature once, or you never could have wooed such a woman. But what have I done to God that he should have thrown us two together ?"

We always know so much better than divine Providence. May not the war cause the creation of a new and more noble France? Bull's Run saved the United States, as the English victory of Bunker's Hill made them.

Delaval died that night, but George was delirious, and did not know it. His head was confused for a long time, and he came to himself very slowly. The first person he knew was his father ; he fancied that he must be in London, because his father never went out of London on any pretence whatever, and his father, as he thought, would never take the trouble to come ten miles to see him ; though he might spend a hundred pounds in sending him a doctor, and scold him violently for the expense afterwards. When he saw his father at his bedstead he concluded that he must be in London.

But only at first : these walls were not London walls, so bright and so clean : and those leaves tapping at the window were vine leaves, which certainly grow in London, but in a most dingy state. The first information that his father gave him was that he was still at Givonne, and that Paris was besieged.

There was an intense tenderness in his father's manner, which he had never noticed before. He made a guess at the reason of this when his mind fully returned to him. He knew that he had lost his left arm.

"And my father," he argued, "thinks that I have forgotten it in my delirium, and hesitates to tell me of it."

The next time that the immovable old face came near his, he threw his remaining arm round the old man's neck and said, "If I had two arms, father, I would put them both round your neck. Forgive your poor cripple for any sorrow he has caused you."

"My own boy, you have caused me no sorrow. I am going to cause you some. Are you strong enough to bear it?"

"Is Elizabeth dead?"

"Your faithful nurse! God forbid that such a thing should happen. She is close by. But the match between you and Ada is broken off. She has behaved more heartlessly than I could have conceived. She has refused, do you understand, to marry you after your accident. It is all over, my poor boy."

"Thank God," said George.

"Are you glad, then?" said his father.

"I don't know yet. Did you say that Elizabeth was here? Send her to me. And, dear father, go away."

When the father came back, a beautiful woman had thrown off her wimple, and had disclosed the magnificent radiance of her hair, which one month afterwards would have been cut away. She said, "I am going to marry your crippled son, sir. I will be a good daughter to you. Try to be a good father to me."

So they then took hands and went down the stream of time together, and never separated in thought, mind, or deed.

And if it had not been for the murderous scoundrel Delaval, trying to kill two of them and himself with the shell on the field, they would never have come together at all. She would have been a good woman wherever she went, but carrying a sore in her heart never to be healed. He would have been a useless man, with a wife whose presence he disliked. They have been both saved from those fates; she is none the less religious, though a dignified mother of a family.

He with her encouragement has made a mark in the world, and his old father says, "No man of this day, sir, has a finer son than I have."

But the old man of an evening got them to tell him over and over again about the poor young men who lay there so thick at Sedan. And he says, "If it had not been for that battle, and for the man Delaval, you two would never have come together. Depend upon it that Providence is right in the end."

We are very much inclined to agree with him.

FRONI.

AN ALPINE STORY.

I.

WHEN the red glowing fire-ball, having completed its daily circle around the dark forest, sinks behind yonder hills, the "Waldbauer" throws away hatchet and saw, and turns his face homewards. The woodpecker also suspends his destructive activity, and the wood is left in peace. That is the rule on three hundred and sixty-four days in the year which does not extend to a three hundred and sixty-sixth.

On a certain day is held the Kirchtag, or Church Festival, in the Alpine village ; the anniversary of the consecration of the church—a great holiday, kept by grand morning and afternoon services, followed by dancing and boundless gaieties, lasting all night long. It is a great day for all. No one will be found missing on such an occasion ; the sick and the old will creep up to the place of assembly—the large stately inn, standing high up on the mountain, in the midst of the dark wood, nearly on a level with the church which crowns the height, whose gilded steeple-tops in forms of Greek crosses shine far out over the land. It is of this day we now write.

The moonless night was lighted up by rockets, flying high up into the air, bursting and shedding down millions of sparks, as if threatening to set the wood on fire ; duly admired by those idly watching their flight, or by others who happen to look up at them in the midst of other amusements. Gunshots, the klingklang of musical instruments, shouts and laughter of human throats rang through the night-air.

"Hollah ho !—Juchhée !" Down the foot-path through the wood came a gay party, consisting of about a dozen boys armed with blazing torches, Boldl at their head, preceded by musicians, piping merrily. They must needs "play Boldl home," and there had been a struggle who should be of the party when Boldl first intimated a wish to go home—not going home to bed exactly, you know, but just under pretence of doing so, to roam about on his way in pursuit of some new sort of fun ; the old stock being quite exhausted.

Boldl (Leopold), "Wild Boldl," as they called him, had been very gay on that day. The first upon the dancing-ground he had occupied his terrain as sole ruler to the end ; he, king of the gaieties, had held sway over those who looked for nothing better than being amused.

They willingly bent under his sceptre, knowing that wherever Boldl was the leader, there was wonderful fun lurking in all corners.

Wild Boldl ! the Wiesenhoftbauern's only son : the richest heir in the neighbourhood—who knew him not ? His fame had spread far

beyond the boundaries of his native village. Wherever any mischief was done, or trick played, Boldl was the instigator of all, as sure as sure could be ; Boldl, and Boldl again, at the bottom of all. As yet he had never done any real harm ; fun was his object in all—but who knew how far and whither his waywardness might lead him ?

His father, whose equanimity was often disturbed by complaints from others and his own apprehensions, quieted his mind by the thought :

" Hannerl (Johanna) will teach him better ; let him marry, and then see how steady he will become ! Wasn't I a bit wild too, and then settled into married life quite easily. They shall be married as soon as possible. In the meantime let him enjoy the remainder of his freedom."

And Boldl *did* enjoy his free life ; the nearer the wedding-day, the wilder his ways, as if to spite those talking of his steadiness to come.

" Juchhée ! I am the Wiesenhoft-Boldl, Juchhée ! As far as I see around, the world is mine—am I a mole not to enjoy it ? Juchhée ! "

So far as to Boldl's morals. Concerning his appearance—well, just have a look at him. Look at the tall, straight, slender figure, with its quick and graceful movements, the regular-featured, open, sunburnt face, ornamented by a black rich moustache with lightly curled ends ; by a pair of smiling lips and pearl white teeth ; short, but curly, raven hair—look into the soft, good-humoured, sparkling dark eyes—and tell me you don't like that creature, if you dare. No, you love Wild Boldl in spite of his reputation, in spite of yourself ; and you would be but too eager to find an excuse should any mischief transpire ; you could not even duly resent a trick practised upon your own self.

Such is Boldl.

And Hannerl ?

Hannerl is a pretty, round-faced, sweet tempered girl, who likes Boldl exceedingly well. Had she not been betrothed to him from earliest childhood she might have fallen in love with him—but there is nothing like those premature arrangements of the parents to prevent any warmer feeling from springing up in a young heart.

Hannerl was daughter of the mayor, who was innkeeper at the same time. The stately inn, and many a substantial building, wide fields and wood, cattle, and a good piece of money, were his own. Hannerl was an only child, like Boldl. Another coincidence : she was the richest heiress, as Boldl was the richest heir. Their grounds lay next to each other, the frontier between the two estates was not even marked by a stile ; nothing but small white stones placed at pretty considerable distances from each other, like mile-stones on the road, indicated the boundaries. When Boldl and Hannerl joined hands in church, those stones need only be removed, and the two estates, wedded to each other,

would become one. Even their respective ages were suitable: Boldl was twenty-three, Hannerl nineteen years of age.

Hannerl knew all the advantages of her position in life. She was above being jealous, she could quietly look on when Boldl danced with other girls. "Let him flirt with these little geese," her lofty thoughts ran; "I shall have him quite for my own soon: mine he is, mine alone!"

The night was far spent when the fellows sallied forth from the inn in search of adventures.

"Juch—Juchhée!"

"Juchhée, héé, héé!" resounded from hill to hill until the sound died away in the farthest distance.

"Boldl! Boldl—Boldl—Boldl—oldl! Wild Boldl!"

"Boldl—Boldl—Boldl"—repeated the fond nymph Echo innumerable times. And peals of laughter, and shouts following, were thrown back from all sides, like mockery of thousands of fairy-like beings inhabiting those woods and hills around.

Suddenly one of the party cried, "Beware!" and all stood still at the commanding word.

Before their feet the ground fell rapidly; they stood above a precipice not practicable for their unsteady feet. A flight of steps just broad enough to offer safe passage to one person, leading down, landed at the door of a little hut of very modest appearance: a hut standing close to the wild brook which, at times swelled into a mighty, high-flowing river, serves to carry the timber cut on the height down into the valley, ready for further transportation. The back of the hut was close to the rock, half cut into the ground, looking as if growing out of it—mushroom-like; the front turned to the river, only a narrow passage between protected by a low fence, ornamented with various pieces of household implements, and some flower-pots around the door and windows. The thatched roof was kept down by large white stones, placed in regular rows upon it, lest the wind should carry off the roof and part of the hut together.

The boys inquisitively lowered their torches and exposed the poor dwelling to view. Lighted up by the unsteady flaring glow it looked not much of a habitation for human beings; rather a hovel than a house.

Boldl's clouded mind was singularly impressed by the sight of those white stones on the roof.

"There is another to keep you company, lest the breeze should blow away my little cottage!" With this, having taken up a large piece of stone from the ground, lifting it high above his head, he with all his might flung it down upon the unhappy roof.

A thundering clap, a cracking, a loud heart-rending shriek of a woman's voice, and the crying of an infant, were the answers to Boldl's misplaced merriment. The stone had fallen through, and evidently

hurt, perhaps killed, a human being. The boys stood aghast; their intoxication wore away, their dim brains began to clear.

Another minute and the door of the hut was flung open, the glaring of a burning piece of pine-wood broke out through it; then followed the appearance of a young woman, one arm holding up the firebrand high above her head, the other pressing a sobbing infant to her motherly breast. The face of the child was overflowing with blood.

As she stood there, in her picturesque undress of printed blue cotton; her tall, slender, yet fully developed form, the pale face framed into a profusion of golden hair streaming down in shining waves far below her knees, her large blue eyes raised with an expression of woful indignation, the infant on her breast; she presented a splendid picture of holy maternity.

The rioters, thunderstruck, stood fastened to the ground: Boldl had never before seen or noticed the young woman; now he stood gazing at her as if he could never tear his eyes from this heavenly apparition; for his life he could not have moved or proffered a word. Sobered by the accident he had quickly recovered his senses as the thought flashed through his brain:

"Thou hast hurt, thou might'st have killed, a human being—an innocent, helpless child!"

The woman raised the firebrand high above her head in order to recognize her aggressors, whose loud mirth had reached her ear through the still night air, whilst she was sitting at her infant's cradle, diligently spinning to earn another day's living for her darling and herself; little fancying in what a terrible way the calmness of her mind would be disturbed.

"I cannot distinguish," she said after a while, with the tremor of violent agitation in the rich tones of her ringing voice; "but without seeing, I know thee, Wild Boldl!"

And with haughty indignation she stepped back, retiring into the cottage and bolted her door.

Darkness and deep stillness, the latter only interrupted from time to time by sobbing sounds from the infant's breast, was reigning again below.

The party slowly moved on; they tried a few more jokes, but it wouldn't take with Boldl; he soon got out some florins, and distributing them amongst the musicians, he said "good night" and went home.

The hut in the wood was that of the "Flösser," whose business it was to watch over the wild waters, and by means of primitive art to regulate their flow to the requirements of the "Waldbauer;" the sluice and weir, the water gates, the dikes and dams, were under the management of that official. But the Bach-Törge had been dead since last spring, when most unfortunately falling down a considerable height,

the decrepid old man, unable to keep up the struggle long, was washed away by his familiar waters.

Froni (Veronica) his young widow, with her orphan baby, lived in the hut now.

II.

NEXT day bore the reflex of the previous night. The setting sun leaves its glorious red glow behind to fade away slowly on the sky; the "Kirchtag" leaves the "Nachkirchtag" to the same effect upon the earth. Where, as in our village, the yearly fair is joined to the Kirchtag, the sale, beginning on Sunday afternoon with sweetmeats, cakes, and other dainties useful for the purposes of the Kirchtag, is carried on the next day on a larger scale. The poor and dependent who cannot afford to spend another day in idle merriment, retire home after marketing. The well-to-do people are so favoured as to drain the cup of joy to the dregs. There is a smaller and select party meeting in the inn, on the dancing-places in the room, and outside on the green turf, on Monday afternoon. Dancing had begun long ago, and Boldl was still missing from the ground.

Hannerl went up and down, pouting her pretty lips, now and then dancing with some boy; then again, under pretence of superintending the servants, retiring into the house, hoping at each new exit to encounter Boldl's joyous greeting. Boldl had been seen walking upwards on the way to the inn. A freshly-cut stick lay over his shoulder, a bundle dangling from it—a well-stocked bundle, tied up in a newly-bought red silk kerchief—just the bundle boys are usually seen to carry to their sweethearts, containing sweets, cakes, ribbons, and other acceptable things from the market.

Boys and girls, merrily walking hand in hand, accosted him. "La! what a bundle for Hannerl!"—"Give me a honey cake, thy sweetheart won't miss it!"—"Well, thou givest us nothing? What a miser!" No joke or taunt could rouse Boldl's usual spirits. Any other day he would have punished a girl's saucy remark with a kiss, or rewarded a flattery with a sweetmeat. But to-day he nodded simply and replied not. A shower of merry words were wasted after him as he silently walked on.

Higher up, where two roads and a footpath meet, he stopped, and first cautiously looked round whether any one could see him. Then suddenly, as if ashamed of his caution, he stamped the ground with his foot, muttering between his teeth: "The d——l! I am not a fool! Have I not a right to go wherever I please, and on my own grounds too?" And swiftly swinging himself round, he with brisk, elastic, firm steps went down the footpath, in the opposite direction to the inn and Hannerl.

Boldl stood at Froni's door. Afraid lest she, seeing him, should bolt

the door against his face, energetically clasping the latch, he pushed the door wide open.

"Grüss Gott!" (God greet thee!) he called out to Froni.

Froni was sitting as usual turned away from the door, at her spinning wheel beside the cradle. She recognized Boldl's voice instantly—had she not often heard those rich manly tones ringing through the wood? Slowly rising from her seat she turned round, and her clear blue eyes fell full upon the intruder, sweeping up and down his tall figure. He felt a chill from top to toe, then suddenly fire rushing through his veins.

"Gott gruss Dich!" Boldl repeated, with a tremulous voice; and he advanced some steps, stretching out his hand to her.

Froni took it not, but quietly kept looking at him as if searching in his face for the motive which might possibly have brought him hither. But when he came up close to her she bent down, and lifting the slumbering baby out of its white cushions, she held it up towards Boldl. He looked down into the quiet, pale little face, with its calm blue eyes now opening, the bruised lump on its delicate white temple, and he felt—he never knew how and what. In the intensity of that undefined feeling, he with an imploring look stretched out his arms towards the child, and receiving it into them, he sank down on one knee, kissing and pressing it to his throbbing heart. He could never part with it: and when at last he looked up from the child to the mother, she saw his handsome dark eyes overflowing with tears.

A vivid colour rushed to Froni's pale face, her eyes dilated, brightened; and the glistening tears bedewed the glowing cheek, which gradually turned to deadly paleness again.

Oh! she was strangely beautiful, that woman, standing before Boldl in her simple cotton gown—before Boldl, the rich Wiesenhofer's Boldl! He gazed at her with rapturous admiration, watching those lovely blushes come and go alternately on her pure, delicate face, until he more felt than saw her shrinking beneath his intense gaze. He rose quickly, putting the baby with careful tenderness into its cradle; then, to hide his embarrassment, moved to the table and began with a trembling hand unfolding the bundle's contents.

"Look here, Froni," he said, without raising his eyes; "here are sweets for Jörg (George) and—and for thee: and here is a nosegay and ribbons for thee?"

"Flowers and ribbons for me?" said Froni, with calm, genuine wondering. "Give that to Hannerl."

Boldl stood embarrassed, not finding the right word to say.

"I do not want anything," Froni continued; "I thank God for having escaped the hardship so far."

"Froni!" cried Boldl, "do not be hard upon me!" And once more he stretched out his hand.

"I do not want to be," she said; her voice softened. And dropping

her eyes she added : "Look here, people missing you on the dancing ground will see you coming out of my hut, and there will be more talk about it than will do us good. It is getting dusk, get thee away, please."

"Who has a right to talk about us, and what do I care for people's gossip !" he fired up, gradually getting himself again.

"*Thou* dost not care, of course: it cannot harm *thee*—but me ?" said Froni, indignantly.

"They shall not hurt thee," cried he ; "and if I choose to remain here, no one shall prevent me."

"And I?" said Froni, in the same tone.

"Thou wilt not drive me from thee: thou dost not hate me, dost thou ?"

Froni remained silent.

"Look here : if I woo thee,—if I offer thee my hand, my whole self, and lands, and forest, and herds, and houses, and all my money,—thou wilt say a kind word to me? Froni, one little word ! Do say thou likest me a little !"

Froni looked up to him with a glance of deepest earnestness. "I am but a poor woman," said she, "who must earn her living and that of her orphan baby by hard handy-work, but I am free to like anyone or not. Boldl, I *cannot* like thee, thy ways are too wild."

"That to me! to the Wiesenhof Boldl !" he exclaimed, overpowered by rage; now quite himself again; quite wild Boldl.

"That to thee !" said Froni, firmly, "to thee, the rich Wiesenhofbauern's son. And if the Wiesenhofbauer himself stood here before me, and asked me to marry his son, I would say No !"

Boldl stood petrified: he could not find another word for his emotion but the expressive "Sapperment !!!"

"There, that is thyself again !" said Froni, sadly. "Adieu; greet Hannerl from me."

Boldl struggled for his breath. "Froni?" he gasped.

Froni held her peace.

"Froni, come to the dancing-place; I will dance with thee alone, in sight of all the village; thou shalt see I am in earnest."

Froni smiled faintly; she pointed to the baby in the cradle: "Here is *my* place; *thine* is at Hannerl's side. Go, and give thy presents to her."

In the same moment a loud, shrill voice, singing out a merry "Jodler" was heard in the neighbourhood.

"God keep thee, and Hannerl !" said Froni, and pointed with a commanding gesture to the bundle and then to the door.

Boldl precipitated himself upon that outstretched hand, and wrung it violently; then hastily gathering up the bundle, he threw it into the cradle, at the infant's feet, to prevent another refusal. Storming out of

the hut, he passed the astonished Tobi, who wonderingly looked after him, and disappeared behind the thick trees.

Tobi (Tobias) was Flösser for the time being, but a bachelor ; the old man did not take up more room in the house than that of a bed in the back kitchen, and a stone seat before the door outside. Froni and her baby, by a mutual understanding, were allowed the use of the house as before, without paying rent, of course. Tobi was godfather to George, and was felt to be a protection to the child's mother. Seeing Boldl at the hut that evening, he apprehended mischief, and from that time kept more at home than he had been wont to.

III.

FROM that time Boldl haunted that part of the wood where the hut stood. He never came right close to the house, but he would roam around it in a narrow circle, pouring out his heart's emotion in song ; or he would stand leaning over the railing above the hut, at the top of the steps, for hours ; silently and patiently waiting for Veronica's appearance, watching her coming and going at her household work. All else seemed to have slipped from his memory : there were no family ties, no other bonds, affections, or attractions existing for him. For Boldl the wide world contained but a little, miserable, thatch-roofed cottage on the wild brook side, in it a young, fair-haired woman with her baby—all the rest was desert—a void.

Mingling with the mysterious rustling of the foliage, the soft, soothing murmuring of the fast falling waters, Froni's sensitive ear caught the deep, wild tones of a passionate love, now warbling in exulting joyfulness, now in playful merriment, then suddenly falling to woe-begone misery, to notes of despair—tones which met a ready echo in the vibration of her young sorrowful heart. The passionate appeal awakened corresponding feelings, which, however, she tried to stifle, never allowing her thoughts to dwell on them. Veronica had not known much of love in her poor life. She scarcely had known herself anything but an orphan or a widow : the short span of her married life had not stirred up any slumbering fonder feelings while it lasted—had not left in her memory either satisfaction, or more than the usual regret at the loss of a true old friend. And now love—a blessing to others—came to her as an evil; some shapeless but dreadful danger which struck her with terror.

By the summer heat most of her household work was done out of doors: could she have said herself whether she did not fetch water oftener than was absolutely necessary ? or whether spinning wheel and baby's cradle had not on some evenings been better indoors ? Tobi, morose and fidgety, sat before the house ; he had ears as well as Froni, and gladly would he have answered Boldl's singing by snatches of biting sarcasm, had he not been afraid of Wild Bo!dl doing something dreadful in

revenge; or the Wiesenhoftbauer getting angry and sending him away from his post, making Froni homeless.

Froni never raised her eyes when she felt Boldl's presence; but his standing above her at the stile, his burning look, followed her about.

One day Froni was occupied in drying her baby's clothes which she had been washing snow-white in the brook. Turned to the water, and intent on her work, she had not looked up or around for a long while. Happening to turn round for some implement, she beheld the shadow of a man thrown by the rays of the sinking sun on the white-washed wall of her hut. That was not Boldl's shadow; it was a much bigger and apparently older man, although there was a great resemblance in outline and attitude. Froni instinctively felt it must be the Wiesenhoftbauer himself. Her heart, terror-stricken, stood still. Recovering her breath after some minutes, she hastened in as if guilty of some fraud, and caught in the act. Safe behind her bolted door she found relief in a passionate burst of tears. From this time she did not trust herself so much out of doors.

But the Wiesenhoftbauer moved away, thoughtfully shaking his head. People had not exaggerated; that *was* a dangerous woman, quite fit to come between a man and his quiet happiness; yet mingling with his feelings of resentment were those of admiration of the fair woman and pity with the poor widow and her orphan baby. Boldl's idleness was in a great measure the cause of this new evil; that the father understood; a radical cure for mental disease was hard bodily work, and accordingly, Boldl was sent up the heights to superintend the cutting of the trees, an office which the father filled himself many another year.

Boldl was up on the mountains all day, superintending the work, and heartily joining in the same; his strong arms and firm hands managed the ponderous hatchet, the hard grinding-saw, the lighter bill-hook, with the same skill and understanding as any other hardy labourer trained to the work from childhood upwards. Coming home at night, he looked over-tired and exhausted, wanting rest as badly as anyone might after a long day's hard labour, and a walk of some hours home. But supper and prayers being over and everybody in the house fast asleep, Boldl tossed about on his bed feverishly; there was no rest for him; no other help but getting up again and noiselessly stealing out at the back door, leading into the wood. He must satisfy himself whether Froni's lamp was still alight. Cloaked with the deep shadows of night, he ventured to creep up close to the hut, trying to get a peep through the open window. Sometimes a light breeze would favour his wishes, by lightly moving the curtain and unveiling the picture within: a poor widowed mother working half the night for the maintenance of her orphan child; or if the curtain kept down obstinately, he would, under cover of the soft noise of the spinning wheel, and emboldened by Froni's

abstraction, stretch out a trembling hand and just lift up a corner of it. Froni usually sat with her back to the window. Her golden hair, not pinned up or covered by a kerchief like other women's, but flowing down in waves covering her like a royal mantle; just a line of her delicate profile, or the faintest glimpse of a pale cheek, was all he could see. And when she moved at last, shaking back her glossy hair with utter weariness, putting aside spinning-wheel, approaching the window in order to draw the shutter in, he flew back, hiding behind the bushy hedge, waiting with a beating heart for her full appearance. Whether lighted by her dim lamp or the full moon, there was always a look of weariness in her face, when she raised her eyes, sending a glance of entreaty up to heaven, contrasting so much with that of haughty resignation she wore in the day-time. The shutter fell in with a click, and the fair vision was gone. Boldl would press his hand to his wildly throbbing, grief-burning breast, and brushing away with his shirt-sleeve the hot tears of despair overflowing his manly face, would draw up his tall figure and move homewards, throwing many a yearning look back into the deep shadows covering the hut. It was dawn-break when he reached his attic, and the first crow of the house-cock called the Waldbauern out to work.

And Froni no longer seeing or hearing Boldl; never guessing his nightly revels; thought herself forgotten and given up like many another of the wild boy's fancies!

Boldl looked daily more ill and spiritless, and his father's anxiety grew in the same measure. "Boldl, my boy!" he said one morning at parting, "I know what ails thee; thou wantest to get out of this unsettled state; it is time for thee to be married. And Hannerl has been ready ever so long—shall we tell her father that we are ready too? When the timber is safely marketed in town you two may be married. Wilt thou fix the day, my boy?" But the boy, with a marble face, turned, and shouldering his hatchet silently walked away.

Ah! the father might well shake his head in perplexity!

The same day a quarrel arose between Boldl and the Flosser Tobi. The latter had seized every opportunity to vex the hated boy, and Boldl had borne it patiently for Froni's sake. But to-day he was exasperated by his father's talk. Meeting Tobi on the height at work, he asked boldly whether Froni would bring his dinner up as she had done once before, and Tobi forbade him to inquire after Froni, or to watch for her, or to dare to approach her anyhow: with what right Boldl could not understand. Violent words were thrown in each other's face. The peasants around drew near; most of them kept to Boldl. But when he declared that no one had a right to interfere, as he, Boldl, was in earnest, and would marry Froni any day, if but she chose to take him they all laughed.

"Wild Boldl marrying a penniless widow with a baby—taking charge

of a beggar-child ! Go, clown, that thou art ! I know and I tell thee what thou wantest—to make her more miserable than she already is—wretch ! ”

Boldl rushed at Tobi, the offender, seizing at his throat—a struggle between the old and the young man must soon turn to Boldl’s advantage ; yet nobody interfered, feeling with Boldl’s vexation. Down went Tobi on the ground. At the same moment a voice was heard. “ *Froni, Froni !* ” There she stood, white and trembling, the baby on her arm. Boldl on seeing her left the man, and precipitating himself towards Froni he passionately threw his arms round her and the child, solemnly exclaiming :

“ Here I swear before God and these men as witnesses, that I will marry thee, if thou wilt accept my hand and all I possess. Thou shalt be my honoured wife ; thy child my own son ! ”

He caught the baby in his arms, which was nearly escaping from Froni’s shaking hands. She stepped back : and leaning her arm against the stem of a tree and her head upon the arm, wept passionately.

IV.

THERE were meetings of a very serious character in the large room of the inn which served also as town-hall on occasions, such as times of great danger, or unusual solemnities. The elder of the village, the “ Förster,” two magistrates of the neighbouring town, met to discuss a most important question—the future fate of the greatest peasant in the country, of Wiesenhofbauer’s only son and heir. Any man in the village having the slightest right or fancying to have a right to put in a word, would put in his nose at the door of the assembly-room, in order to have a finger in the pie. The mayor presided with haughty dignity. “ If it were not for the estates,” he said, “ Boldl might go to Froni if he choose, or to the deuce, for aught he cared : a girl like Hannerl had but to stretch out both her hands to have a suitor hanging on each of her ten fingers. Hannerl herself had cried a good deal on hearing of the scandal ; but after a while her spirits rose, and throwing her pretty little nose up into the air, she said, “ Bah ! there are other boys enough ! and if Boldl does not himself give up every thought of Froni, I won’t look at him again, let father say what he likes.”

The worthy assembly of notables had decided unanimously from the very first upon sending Veronica away to her distant home. The means by which this sentence might best be executed were discussed a long time. At length the final resolution was taken.

A new Flösser, a strong young man, was to be appointed ; Tobi was to go working in the forest as before. The hut was to be put in repair at once, to be ready for the new inhabitant. So, of course, Froni

was homeless, and there was no other room for her to be got in the village ; no dwelling, however poor, was to open its door to the widow and orphan. The magistrates would advise her to go home to her native village ; she was proud, would take the hint and go.

The Wiesenhoftbauer would pay her journey : would not the mayor do a trifle for her maintenance ? but Hannerl's father proudly exclaimed : " No ! " So far all right, but the world at large would call it a hard measure to send a widow and an orphan away ; just before whter, too. It was always hard work for her to get her own living and the child's. It would be a grand thing to care for the baby who was born in the parish, and was in some sense belonging to it. Keep the child and let the mother go. But would the mother part with the child ? Froni surely would not—poor mothers are always unreasonably fond of their children. But one might make her give up the baby. It was pretty sure that she could not produce a certificate of her marriage ; in that case she might be treated as a girl whose baby did not so much belong to her as to the community in which it was born—she would be sure then to go home to get her papers. That would last months, and then she would perhaps have learned to see that she could get on much better by herself ; that the baby had better remain where it was being taken care of. Or should she come back, Boldl and Hannerl would be married by that time : she would not care to meet the young couple, and all would end quietly.

The plan was to be executed whilst Boldl was at the large sale of timber in town. On his return he would be told that Froni, finding it too hard to earn her living, had gone home leaving her child upon the parish. Where her native village lay—*no one knew*.

Of course in after years Boldl and Froni would thank the magistrates for their kind interference—it was altogether a good, Christian work.

The Wiesenhoftbauer smiled with satisfaction, as his son in his handsome Sunday suit jumped into the new cart, painted red and blue. Hans cracked his whip, the pair of prancing bays darted off, and Boldl was gone to town for a week or so. His father resolved not to lose time ;—but he had made his reckoning without Hans, the head servant man of his farm, who, like all the rest of the household, was devoted to Boldl.

Hans set out on the journey with a heavy heart ; he had an inkling of something going wrong, without as yet having got to the bottom of the affair.

Boldl made his progress to town with a gay heart. It was true though, that Froni kept sending him back to Hannerl whenever he found occasion to go near her with declarations of his warm love. But yesterday, at parting, she had not as usual refused shaking hands, and whilst her hand was trembling in his, her bright eyes shone with true love : it was but a moment, but Boldl was happy. He would woo in

patience and endurance, being now sure of the end. Wild Boldl had become wonderfully meek and patient !

In one place near town they stopped to refresh themselves and the horses. Hans entered into conversation with the stable-boy ; the latter had seen two magistrates, accompanied by two armed officials, drive from town into the country, and he had caught some of the talk about their day's work. Seated again on the box, he turned round and imparted to his young master what he had learned.

"Turn the horses' heads back homewards!" shouted Boldl, jumping up from his seat. "I will take the responsibility." They took another way home to avoid attention, and Boldl alighted at the forest. What became of the large sale of timber in town without him we are unable to record.

Froni's hut presented a sad sight. It was empty, the few pieces of furniture lying outside. There lay the spinning-wheel and the empty cradle turned over ! Boldl with a shout of distress rushed forward and nearly killed the man who was engaged in repairing the tumble-down place. The man, frightened to death, told him all that had happened.

"And she has gone, really gone?"

"How could she help it, poor thing, with the magistrates upon her?"

"And left the baby? how could she!"

"How could she? when they had got it, and two armed men between her and the child?"

"Can she really be gone!"

"She has gone, for I saw them accompany her down the high-road." Boldl gave himself up to a paroxysm of rage and despair.

"Ah, yes, poor thing!" sighed the mason, calmly taking to plastering the wall again.

With Boldl was a conviction that Froni was not gone ; had not forsaken her baby. She was hiding in the wood ; he would find her, and then they would fetch their baby. If his father had driven her out into the world, well—he had driven out his own son too!

After long hours of suspense, anxiety, and useless searching, Boldl wild with grief and exhaustion approached the mayor's house. He had information that the baby had been brought there for the present in want of another home for it. It was clear, bright moonlight, but no one was abroad ; Boldl could approach the inn unseen. A watch-dog prepared to bark, but recognizing Boldl's familiar, caressing voice, he came near, wagging his bushy tail, and followed him on his errand. Boldl went round the large building, he passed the mayor's room and Hannerl's curtained window ; he knew the child would not be there : he proceeded to the servants' part, giving a look in at each window, with a sharp ear to catch every sound. But all was still. At the farthest away from any

of the house-people's windows, there was one standing open, only covered with wire muslin to keep flies and other insects out. Boldl gave a hardy push, and his hand broke through the wire-blind. Entrance into the house was won. He thrust his hand farther in to remove the hooks, and wirework and frame came out at once. Floods of moonlight streamed into the dark room, and there in the middle of the room stood something huge which Boldl recognized as a finely-carved cradle. Here, indeed, lying in Hannerl's cradle, lay Froni's baby. They had put him out of the way, lest his crying should disturb their sleep. The child had been crying indeed for some hours, finding itself alone in a strange place; but at last it fell asleep, and now slept the good, sound slumber of childhood.

Boldl had but one idea: getting hold of the baby—his own baby, lest it should disappear like its mother. He introduced himself into the room by the window accompanied by the dog, knelt at the cradle, kissed the little face, took up the bundle of feather-beds containing his precious boy, and made out of the window in triumphant speed. He called the willing dog to follow him, lest they, noticing the fraud too soon, should send him on his track; and man, dog, and baby-bundle soon plunged into the thick forest, leaving no trace behind.

A few minutes after Boldl's withdrawal another form broke out of the wood, appearing on the lighted-up place before the inn. It drew near the house in the same cautious, stealthy way, and the same manœuvre began over again.

Boldl had been right; Froni was not quite gone. Seeing herself too weak to grapple with the authorities of the place, she resolved to go—not home into her own village—sending a letter to her old teacher and patron the priest, for the papers would do the work—but to go up to the emperor himself. Francis Joseph was in Styria, and many an instance of his benevolence and gracious clemency, his cordial behaviour to the country-folks, had become a current tale in the villages far about. Froni would journey night and day, she would throw herself at the emperor's feet; she knew right would be done to her, for she knew enough of the world to see that she had been dealt with most unlawfully.

But before she undertook the great task, before setting out on the long journey, she must see her child once more, kiss it, and then go.

Froni had found the open window and seen the cradle; Boldl had prepared the way—Froni was in the room. She knelt at the cradle praying to God for strength and patience, her tears fell hot: one look, one kiss, one blessing, and she must be gone again! Her head softly went down into the white cushions, and she gave a piercing shriek—the bed was empty—was her child dead, then!

She darted up, a piece of the baby's clothes lay on the floor near the window, another hung upon the shelf, a third outside on a bush.

Her baby had been stolen ! She rushed to the door : it was fastened outside. Her knocks and shrieks brought some of the maids up, some men-servants followed, the door was opened. They took her for a mad-woman, not recognizing her at first—not able to collect the sense of her wild talk. The master himself appeared ; he thought a whole band of thieves, robbers, murderers had broken in. He was the first to take in the state of things : the child was stolen, that was evident; and the robber must be run after. A wild hunt began whose utter confusion defies description. Every one ran in different directions, no one knowing where to direct his steps. The men shouted, the women shrieked, the dogs barked, the master swore, the neighbours came, joining the hunt, the whole village began to stir. And Froni foremost ; her hair flying, her garments torn, her feet and arms bleeding, darting up and down, now joining one party, now another, now again flying by herself onwards, outstripping the others too slow for her anxiety.

Boldl would have had far the better of his pursuers had he not been hindered in speed : first, by the baby bundle he was afraid to introduce between the thorny bushes running right across homewards: secondly, by the dog's unwillingness to follow him. As soon as the latter heard the voices of his own people of the inn he wanted to run back to them, declining to hear and obey Boldl any longer. He had to keep him tight by the leather strap round his neck, dragging the beast along with him. So far all right still. He advanced slowly, but as yet was clear out of sight of his followers, when suddenly stumbling over some roots, losing his equilibrium, requiring both his hands to save his baby from a heavy fall, he for one moment involuntarily let the dog loose—and off darted the nasty beast ! Now Boldl knew all was lost. But to be caught here in the wood, like a common thief and robber ? No, by no means ! and onwards again he toiled.

His pursuers, led by the dog, now could not fail to get at him. Boldl now stood between them and the wild rushing river. A thought flashed through his brain, followed by instant execution. He ran to the next weir he knew of; it was a convenient passage for him, and, to prevent those behind him from following, he, coming to the middle of it, drew out the huge iron nail, hastening to reach the end before the waters came down.

Froni now stood by the side of the brook, panting for breath, her bosom heaving ; she had recognised Boldl, and knew with a thrilling happiness her baby was not stolen but saved. But scarcely had she been able to take in that bewildering truth than she must again tremble for the two beings she loved more than her life. The waters came on with a thundering noise ; one more step and Boldl would be safe, when suddenly his foot slipping, he had but time to throw the baby away from him, landing it safely in the high grass ; then gliding down he disappeared as by magic, the floods covering him

and washing him out of sight. A piercing shriek from Froni, echoed by all the bystanders, and the rushing of the waters. Then, many feet below, Boldl's form came up to the surface, faintly struggling with the floods. All stood helpless and hopeless. Not so Froni. He had tried to save her child! She ran down the slope, with a winged pace, overgaining the current. Having got a-head of the drowning man; having chosen the right place, where the waters flow on level ground for a few yards; she boldly threw herself down, with outstretched arms, receiving Boldl's nearly lifeless form as the waters carried him downwards. Surrounding his body with one arm she managed to raise his head and keep it over the waters, her other arm working against the stream. Good swimmer as Froni had been once in her home on the shore of the lake, formed by the wild waters rushing into it; here in the falling waters, forming cascade after cascade, with her load, swimming was out of the question; all she could do was to contrive to remain afloat on her back until those who saw her deed and now followed with speed should come to the rescue.

Help was greatly needed: they were approaching a great fall at greater height than they would have been able to stand. But before they came to it, the passage was barred with logs and branches; and many a villager's arms were employed to bring on shore the two who, having been next to united in death, should never again in this life be parted.

Froni lay in high fever in the Wiesenhof, in the master's own bed; she was tended and cared for with attention and anxiety. Boldl, who after a day or two was quite himself again, except that he felt a good deal knocked up, had run up to town for a couple of physicians. The village smith, who cured the rest of the world in the place, he thought not good enough for the present case. The learned doctors came: two very clever men, who, after a private conversation with Boldl, immediately understood the state of affairs. Whenever they spoke to Boldl their talk was gay and hopeful, but when they had to do with his father, encouraged by the son's twinkling and nodding, their faces grew grave and long, expressing fear and doubt. It was a sad case; not belonging to the run of daily occurrences: a young, delicate woman dying for having saved a young man's life; for surely Boldl was so far gone, had not she contrived to keep his head above the flood, risking her own life, there had been an end of wild Boldl on earth. But there might be still hope for her recovery, if they could only gladden her heart in some way as soon as she regained her senses.

The Wiesenhofbauer went about his house grave and silent. His only son had been saved to him by Froni—just by her! And his only son was resolved on one thing: Froni dying, he would adopt her child and make him his heir: Froni living, she would become his wife. If his father would not consent—well, he would leave his home and go with his wife

and child to another place, earning their living, working as a labourer on some farm.

The father saw that, by his harsh and unlawful proceedings against Froni, he had severed his son's heart from his own, and he felt he must suffer from it. He was his only child; the father could not do without him. So there was no help but giving in, though with a sour face he spoke his consent. But his trials were not over: he had another lesson of humility yet to learn.

Froni was convalescent. Her baby was crawling on her bed; diving, as it were, in a sea of golden waves streaming down the red silk coverlet, his little fingers brushing through his mother's curly hair, all his movements accompanied by shrieks of delight. And now Boldl entered. He sat down at the side of the bed, where he had been watching through many a long anxious night. Boldl and Froni talked a long time; Boldl would not give way—but he found it hard to persuade Froni, until she saw that he was resolved.

"Dost thou remember," she said gravely, "what I said to thee once?—and if the Wiesenhofbauer himself came ——"

"And when the Wiesenhofbauer himself comes to ask thee to marry his son—Froni! Froni! what wilt thou say?" He waited in breathless suspense, and no answer coming, he repeated the question: "What wilt thou say?" His loving eye, his eager hand, waited for a reply.

Froni hid away her tearful face, and putting her hand in his, she sobbed, "God willed it so!"

And Froni was in Boldl's arms, firmly clasped to his faithful breast, her hair and eyes covered with his kisses, her lips softly whispering: "Oh, how I love thee!" The baby looked on with amazement and utter want of understanding, but rather amused than displeased at the scene.

At sunset the Wiesenhofbauer came into the room—there was no escape, Boldl would have it, and the father had to do it—gravely smiling and congratulating Froni on her recovery. Then he sat down on the chair and began to play with the baby, trying in succession several topics. But talking of this and talking of that would not bring the Bauer any nearer to what he had to say. He grew impatient with himself, nothing would prove an introduction. What he had to say must be spoken out by itself, right from beginning to end, and he did not care to meet with his son before the thing was done. So, putting down his pride, he suddenly broke out:

"Well, Froni, if thou wilt have my son, take him."

Veronica smiled. "What am I to do with so wild a boy?"

"Well, what am *I* to do with him in the end? I want to get rid of him. Thou mightst try to tame him—I can't!"

"Shall I try, indeed?"

"Do try, in Heaven's name!" And the old man lay his blessing

hand upon the golden hair of the woman. She drew it down and pressed it to her lips ; her tears fell hot upon it. The old man, too, cried. Coming out of the room, he fell into the arms of his son. "Thou hast been listening, rascal!"

"No, father, I see in your face that all is right. Father, you were about to lose an only son—you have won him back and found a daughter."

"And a grandson," added the Bauer, who had grown fonder of the baby than he as yet cared to own.

Now, when you visit the Wiesenhof, you are greeted by little George, running about merrily in the yard, or riding on Tobi's old knee, or helping his grandfather to a fresh pipe. The Wiesenhofbauer has given up all work to his son ; he enjoys sitting in the clean yard, under the little wine-covered verandah at the door, observing his children's active pursuits all day long ; his eyes follow with smiling satisfaction the fair young woman so strangely beautiful in her simplicity, and his mouth is full of his daughter's praise. And in the comfortable, large bedroom, there stands a new cradle : Boldl has fetched it from town himself for his little daughter ; she is but a fortnight old—an age we consider too young for her to appear on the scene—although her father manages to sit over the cradle for hours together contemplating her unrivalled beauty.

The mayor never got over his vexation. He sold his estates, and now lives in the town. Hannerl, by virtue of her money, was soon married to a townsman—a gentleman, her father said. She did not fail to produce her husband ; together with a new bonnet of the last shape, matching her light grass-green town costume ; in her native village, envied by many a girl who covered her fair head with a white or red silk handkerchief. The Wiesenhofbauer thought her bonnet was not worth Veronica's cap, and Veronica's rich golden hair of natural growth.

And so in the end all were satisfied and happy. Would you have it otherwise, dear reader?

M. S. E.



JEREMIAH HORROCKS.

"For myself, what I saw with my own eyes in the heavens supplied me with sufficient evidence of the certainty of the observation, almost all the circumstances of which I had predicted to my friends : and I silently congratulate myself that my correction of the motion of Venus, which I had not before sufficiently appreciated, has been confirmed, beyond my utmost hopes."—HORROCKS'S "*Venus in Sole Visa.*" (Whatton's Translation.)

KEPLER, having completed the Rudolphine tables, which enabled him to calculate the motions of the inferior planets, arrived at the conclusion that a transit of Venus would occur on Dec. 6, 1631, towards sunset, and not again during that century : this he proclaimed to the world ; but, dying in 1630, left others to watch for the fulfilment of his prediction. In obedience to his wishes, Gassendi, and many other astronomers, watched attentively with their telescopes when the time arrived ; but no Venus appeared before the sun's disc : it is now well known that the transit of 1631 occurred at midnight, and hence the disappointment of the observant astronomers, who greatly lamented losing—as they thought—the only transit of Venus to occur during that century. But—*was it the only one?* The great Kepler—that "Prince of Astronomers"—had said it, and so all believed, little dreaming that there lived at that very time, in a quiet English village, a child of about twelve years old who was to predict celestial wonders, while his "youthful days were yet scarce complete;" who would choose for his theme "Venus the Queen of Love, veiled by the shade of Phœbus' light."^{*}

And his predictions would be fulfilled.

This child, who was destined to astonish the scientific world, was born at Toxteth near Liverpool, in the year 1619, or, as some say, 1616. His name was Jeremiah Horrocks. His ancestry—King Arthur-like—is shrouded in mystery, which is not astonishing, considering the stormy times in which he drew his first breath ; a time when soldiers were wont to burn registers, wills, and other priceless documents.

Toxteth, in those days of persecution, was a safe retreat for the sorrowful Puritans ; and there they lived in such simplicity and virtue that, by many, this rural hamlet was called "The Holy Land of Toxteth." In 1612 the little community, careful for the education of their children, built a school-house, and, in 1619, a chapel ; for they

* Horrocks's own words, which are interspersed throughout this article, are quoted chiefly from his treatise, "*Venus in Sole Visa*" (Whatton's translation) ; and from his letters to Crabtree, given in the "*Opera Posthuma,*" edited by Dr Wallis. We have also gleaned from other portions of the latter, when it has seemed desirable that Horrocks should speak for himself.

had hitherto prayed together and worshipped in a shady glen called "The Dingle." Richard Mather, the celebrated Puritan, who subsequently emigrated to New England, was chosen, first teacher, then minister to the people of Toxteth.

The boy Horrocks, at the age of thirteen or fifteen, left the secluded place of his nativity, and travelled, probably partly on foot, partly on horseback, to the University of Cambridge, where he wished to study for the Church. He entered as sizar at Emanuel College, matriculating in the summer of 1632. Some have considered the fact of his being on the college foundation conclusive as to the very humble character of his origin; but to us it seems merely to prove that his parents were slenderly provided with money, while it favours the supposition of their belonging to the educated classes, who would leave no plan untried to obtain university training for this child of "very strange, unaccountable genius." Horrocks, in his writings, alludes more than once, but with perfect obedience and resignation, to his "poverty." This same "poverty" was probably the reason of his being obliged to leave Cambridge before he had graduated. We see in the registers of Emanuel College, the following entry appended to the name of Jeremiah Horrocks—"did not graduate." As it is well known that he studied hard, possessed wonderful capabilities, and was remarkable for the beauty of his disposition and his stainless life, it must have been cruel poverty alone which shortened for him the career of study he loved so well. It appears that he bid farewell to college scenes in 1635. During his brief stay at Cambridge, the boy had worked not only diligently but successfully. He had first studied the subjects then included in an academical education; after this, he had given himself up for a time to the enjoyment of the Latin authors, in order to master the language which was in those days the key to all knowledge and the medium of communication among the learned. In this study he attained considerable proficiency, as is attested by his elegant Latin treatise, "*Venus in Sole Visa.*"

In his hours of recreation the youthful collegian would stroll out into the country, far away from his companions, and in the solitude of the fields he would peacefully enjoy the beauties of nature: there he would "stand still and consider the wondrous works of God," gazing upwards at the "stars of light." "It seemed to me," he said, "that nothing could be more noble than to contemplate the manifold wisdom of my Creator as displayed amidst such glorious works." As he gazed, he was seized with a desire to understand, and to "feed upon their beauty by a more careful examination of their mechanism." He resolved, therefore, to obtain access, if possible, to the sublime secrets of astronomy.

With this in view, as a preliminary step, he devoted his energies to the study of mathematics, for which he had already evinced a remarkable

aptitude. When the time came that he should approach the object of his ambition, and commence his "commerce with the heavens," he was at the outset amazed at "the abstruse nature of the science," which, moreover, was not then taught at Cambridge. He climbed the first steep and difficult ascent in solitude, without guidance, without sympathy; but, being fired with enthusiasm, he never failed in courage. "To complain of philosophy," he said, "on account of its difficulties would be foolish and unworthy." He determined that "the tediousness of study should be overcome by industry; his poverty (failing a better method) by patience; and that instead of a master, he would use astronomical books." He was strengthened also, by the examples of those who had successfully climbed the hill before him. In allusion to Tycho Brahe, Kepler, and others, he writes:—"It was a pleasure to me to meditate upon the fame of these great masters of science, and to emulate them in my aspirations." And again, calling to remembrance how many had overcome difficulties as great as his own, he says: "Having heard of others acquiring knowledge without greater help, I would blush that anyone should be able to do more than I."

But amid all his brave determination, there is one thing to which he cares not to be reconciled: and this is the want of the "sympathy of companionship." He touchingly complains of being unable to "imbue others with a love for astronomy," lamenting that "most of his friends care little for science; but rather for their hawks and hounds, to say no worse;" still, he allows that "England is not without votaries of astronomy; with some of whom," he adds, "I am acquainted."

That love with which he could not imbue others, triumphed over all the difficulties that beset his path; and before long he found himself on heights which he had viewed from a distance, scarcely hoping to attain. "I have been blessed," he says, "by God's grace, with such success that even now I have somewhat to be proud of."

On quitting Cambridge, he returned to the seclusion of his native village, where he remained for three years, 1635-1638, probably teaching, or in some way patiently working for his daily bread, while awaiting a curacy. During this period of industrious waiting his time was so economised as to allow many hours to be spent in the observation of the starry heavens. He now rejoiced in the possession of a telescope, which he cherished and loved as a friend, occasionally gratefully extolling it in Latin verse; while in his calmer moods he thus enumerates the merits of the "sight-assisting tube," which enabled "his mortal eyes to scan the furthest heavens." He writes: "I possessed a telescope of my own of such power as to show even the smallest spots upon the sun, and to enable me to make the most accurate division of his disc; one which in all my observations, I have found to represent objects with the greatest truth."

And now, let us see what light can be thrown on those suggestive words quoted above : "with some of whom I am acquainted."

Amid the sublime joys of his midnight studies, the "excellent youth Horrocks," as he has been called, still desired human companionship. While at Toxteth he would sometimes entreat "sundry passers-by" to gaze at the planet Venus in her crescent phase : the villagers, because the telescope was to them a strange instrument, failed to see what, to Horrocks, clearly glittered forth in resplendent beauty ; thus he was left in sad solitude, and it was in vain that he invited the rustics of Toxteth to share with him what he called his "Uranian banquets." But he was not much longer to be saddened by this lack of sympathy.

There dwelt in Lancashire at that time an English gentleman of high culture, named Christopher Townley, who, as we read, "stuck not at any cost or labour to promote as well astronomical and other mathematical studies, by a diligent correspondence kept and maintained with the learned professors in these sciences."

The marvellous young astronomer hidden from the world, and moving among quiet scenes at Toxteth, was not unknown to this generous patron of science, who had, moreover, discovered three other "votaries of astronomy"—William Milbourn, curate of Brancepath, Durham, who, amid the pastoral duties of his remote little parish, found some leisure for the beautiful and intricate study of which Horrocks was enamoured ; William Gascoigne, inventor of the micrometer, and the youthful representative of a good old Yorkshire family ; and William Crabtree, of Broughton, near Manchester, "who had few superiors in mathematical learning," as Horrocks tells us. Why should not these "four lights of the Northern Hemisphere," as they are called by a contemporary, be linked together by correspondence ? So thought Christopher Townley, who accordingly took means to "bring them to the acquaintance of one another," on which account he was greatly loved by all the four."

And now the solitude in study was at an end : for there was an especial affinity between Horrocks and William Crabtree, who soon became bound together by a firm friendship which lasted until death parted them.

In 1638 Horrocks was appointed to the curacy of Hoole, near Preston. Hoole was, in those days, a dreary and isolated village,

"Far from resort of people that did pas
In traveill to and fro."

But Horrocks was happy in his new home : he gave his mind to the conscientious discharge of his pastoral duties : never failing : always at his post. What was it to him that Hoole was removed from the rest of the world ? He courted peaceful scenes : he loved an open country, where he could enjoy an unbroken view of the overhanging firmament, "fretted with golden fires." He was contented with the little

church of St. Michael, beautiful in its tasteful simplicity; and in it he placed a sun-dial, on which he inscribed the words: "Sine sole sileo," while on the church-clock was this motto, "Ut hora sic vita." We suppose in both cases the inscriptions were chosen by the young curate: but this is not proved.

In the early days of his astronomical studies Horrocks had met with a treatise in which Lansberg was mentioned with unqualified praise: he straightway desired to see the writings of the Belgian astronomer, some of which, in spite of his poverty, he managed, with some difficulty, to obtain; and these he studied assiduously, nothing doubting, for Lansberg proclaimed his astronomical tables to be infallible, and this with such confidence as to point to the conclusion that they had been tested and proved beyond possibility of doubt. Horrocks, who had himself made most careful calculations, was constantly annoyed at finding those of Lansberg not in harmony with his own. No longer working totally alone, he consulted his friend; and here Crabtree did him valuable service. Feeling great faith in the work done by Horrocks, he dared to suggest that it was Lansberg who was in error. And this proved true. Horrocks, on this discovery, was fired with indignation at the conceit of the "boasting Belgian": but it was not long before he "freely forgave" him, for having introduced him to the writings of Kepler—although in the way of disparagement; and more than this:—he again pardons "the miserable arrogance of the Belgian astronomer," and ceases to lament the misapplication of his time, as he was thereby led to consider and foresee the appearance of Venus in the Sun.

He resolved for the future, "with his own eyes, to observe the positions of the stars in the heavens:" he made use of his own ephemerides to ascertain "the positions of the distant planets, and was thus enabled to predict their conjunctions, their appulses to the fixed stars, and many other extraordinary phenomena."

While pursuing his independent observations, a strange light dawned upon him: he received the first intimation concerning what he dared not yet predict. The lovely planet Venus now attracted his especial regard.

Horrocks reverently honoured Kepler, "to whose discoveries alone," he said, "all who understand the science of astronomy will allow that we owe more than to those of any other person." Nevertheless, never forgetful of his resolution to investigate all for himself, he set to work with much seriousness to correct Kepler's calculations of the motions of the Sun and Venus, "an undertaking," he says, which could not be displeasing to Kepler himself, as he frankly confesses that these matters were not as yet freely explored." As Horrocks proceeded in his work the light that had dawned upon him grew clearer and clearer, till at last he, feeling perfectly assured, on Oct. 26, 1639, wrote

thus to his friend :—" My reason for now writing is to advise you of a remarkable conjunction of the Sun and Venus on the 24th of November, when there will be a transit. As such a thing has not happened for many years past, and will not occur again in this century, I earnestly entreat you to watch attentively with your telescope, in order to observe it as well as you can," &c.

During the weeks which intervened between the prediction and its fulfilment, the chance of a clouded atmosphere caused great anxiety to the two friends. Horrocks observes that " Jupiter and Mercury were in conjunction with the Sun almost at the same time as Venus, which remarkable assemblage of the planets," he adds, "(as if they were desirous, of beholding, in common with ourselves, the wonders of the heavens, and of adding to the splendour of the scene) seemed to forebode great severity of weather. In this apprehension," he further remarks, " I coincide with the opinion of the astrologers, because it is confirmed by experience; but in other respects I cannot help despising their more than puerile vanities."

The day at last arrived : it was Sunday ; Horrocks—who had not any one at hand to assist in the appointed services—would be compelled twice to quit his astronomical observation. But, in spite of this—happier than Kepler—he witnessed the fulfilment of his prediction.

" When the time of the observation approached," he says, " I retired to my apartment, and, having closed the windows against the light, I directed my telescope, previously adjusted to a focus, through the aperture, towards the sun, and received his rays at right angles upon the paper already mentioned. The sun's image exactly filled the circle, and I watched carefully and unceasingly for any dark body that might enter upon the disc of light."

Horrocks, having officiated at the afternoon service, returned just in time to behold the dark body enter upon the disc of light. Venus was faithful to the hour he had prophesied ; he, in his rapture of joy, was still master of himself : in the short period available, he took accurate observations of " the phenomenon which," he writes, " I was enabled by Divine Providence to complete so effectually that I could scarcely have wished for a more extended period."

William Crabtree had also seen the transit : but—" rapt in contemplation, he became almost unconscious through excess of joy," and was thus incapacitated for observing.

Shortly after this triumphant achievement Horrocks visited Toxteth ; intending from thence to travel to Broughton to see William Crabtree, a joy on which he had long set his heart. He wrote, fixing January 4, 1641, for this meeting : " I shall be with you on that day," he said, " if nothing unforeseen should occur." But something unforeseen did occur.

On January 3rd, very early in the morning, to the sorrow and amaze-

ment of those few who knew him, and to the never-ceasing regret of astronomers, this remarkable youth died quite suddenly.

William Crabtree, although he lived on, never forgot his "dear Horrocks," his "second self." "Irreparable loss! And I am bereaved of my dearest Horrocks!" he wrote on the packet of letters he had received from his friend. In writing of him to Gascoigne a year after the sudden and sorrowful event, he says: "for whose immature death there is scarce a day which I pass without some pang of sorrow."

At Hoole Church, where Horrocks officiated as a hard-working curate on a small pittance—through the exertions of the present rector, the Rev. R. Brickel, to whom we are also indebted for the late Mr. Whatton's valuable translation of "Venus in Sole Visa"—there is a suitable Memorial erected in honour of one "so young and yet so learned : so learned and yet so pious."

It is impossible here to allude to much important astronomical work done by Horrocks, some of whose theories Sir Isaac Newton himself—who calls him "that excellent astronomer, Horrocks"—adopted as "more logical than any yet brought forward." The scientific men of the 17th century constantly mentioned the name of Horrocks with appreciation and affection, lamenting bitterly his early death. "It was a great loss," says James Gregory, the mathematician, in writing to Collins, "that he died so young: many naughty fellows live till eighty."

The vast and costly preparations now being made throughout the civilized world for the observation of the transit of December 9, 1874, would have greatly astonished and gratified the first observer of that phenomenon, who accomplished so much with such a scarcity of means. Venus will appear before the Sun's disc once more during this century, namely in 1882, and not again until June 9th, 2004. How changed will all be then! How much will be entirely forgotten which interests us now! But as the astronomers of 2004 begin to watch for Venus, at a little before nine o'clock on that distant morning, surely they cannot fail to remember Jeremiah Horrocks.



A SUMMER'S HISTORY.

"YOU think you love me well enough to trust your happiness in my hands, Robert?"

Margaret Wayne asked the question seriously. She wanted her lover to think what he was doing, in asking her to be his wife.

"I do not think: I know," he answered, with all a lover's eagerness. "You will not tell me no, Margery?"

"I will not tell you no, Robert," she answered, with a grave, sweet smile.

He slipped a ring upon her finger: and, bending down, lifted her face in his hands, and kissed her with a betrothal kiss.

"Mine now," he said, tenderly, "and mine always."

They had wandered into the orchard of the old Wayne homestead, and it was there he had made his offer. She sat on still under the large pear tree when he was gone, and thought it all over. A year ago, Robert Earl was a stranger to her. Now he was her lover; her promised husband; and she was happy. Mr. Earl had settled in the neighbourhood. He was an independent man, a gentleman, desirable in all ways. Margaret had learned to love him as one can love but once in this world.

Sitting there, she wondered if there had ever been so beautiful a day before. The sky was blue as it had ever been on any summer day since Eden. The growing, rich grass in the meadow crinkled like a sea when the warm south wind blew over it. The apple and pear trees were in full blossom, and the air was full of their delightful fragrance. Every wind that blew up the hill-side shook their pink-and-white leaves down about her like a shower of scented snow. Robins sang in the branches; sang loud, and clear, and long; and over all the sun shone warm and bright.

"A beautiful day in which to have such happiness come into my life," she said, softly, with a deep exultant stir of gladness at her heart. It was so sweet to know that he loved her best of anybody in the world: that they were to walk through life side by side.

"I wonder if I can accept this day's sunshine as a prophecy of coming days? I hope so. Dear Robert!" And then she dropped her head upon her hands, and fell to musing in a quiet, happy way, as maidens will, about the glad, beautiful dream of life, whose other name is love.

By-and-by, she rose and went into the house: a substantial, old-fashioned dwelling, with a good deal of land attached to it. Mrs. Wayne looked up from her work as she entered.

"Margery, here's a letter for you. It has come by the afternoon post. I think it is from May Callingford."

"Yes, it is from May," replied Margaret, as she opened it. "She has accepted your invitation, mamma, and will come and stay all the summer."

"I shall be very glad to see Mary's child," was the answer of Mrs. Wayne : Mary being her sister ; but they had not met for many years. "May was a baby when I saw her last : she is a woman grown now, I suppose. Dear ! dear ! How fast time runs away, and how people change. It does not seem so very long ago but you were a baby too, Margery, and your father was alive : and yet how many years it is!"

Mrs. Wayne looked thoughtfully away toward the hill where the church-spire pointed heavenward. In the grave-yard there, her husband slept beside the boy and girl who had gone to Heaven before him. She often read the names carved on the three white stones, and wondered when hers would stand beside them.

"I am sure you will like her," Margery said, that night, to her lover, as they lingered by the gate, in the shadow of the great lilac-bush, crowned right royally with nodding plumes of fragrant blossoms. "I have never seen May, but I have her picture ; and I have almost come to know her through her letters. Beautiful letters they are. I would read some of them to you, Robert, if I thought you'd like to hear them."

"I would rather hear you talk to me," he answered. "Let me crown you, Margery."

He broke some lilac-blossoms from their stalks, and wove them deftly into a wreath. When he had finished it he placed it on her brown hair.

"Margaret, my queen," he whispered, and bent to steal a kiss.

And she, looking in his blue smiling eyes and tender face, thought that no maiden had ever so true and brave a lover before.

I wonder if every maiden, since the world began, has not thought the same thing ? All too many have. And all too many men have, like him, mistaken the liking born of companionship for love.

Margaret plunged into a sea of small cares in preparation for this coming of her cousin, May Callingford. She felt a strange anxiety to see her, and to have her near her. Later, she wondered why it should have been so.

"I begin to be half jealous of this wonderful cousin of yours," Robert said to her one day. "You talk about her |half your time : what will it be when she is here? I shall be crowded into the shade completely, I suppose. I almost wish she wasn't coming."

"Now you ought to be ashamed to talk so!" cried Margery, in jest. "I have not the least doubt but that I shall be the one to complain of being thrust into the shade, and no doubt I shall get fearfully

jealous. Of course you will admire May's pretty face—and she *is* pretty, we hear; and the first thing you'll do will be to fall in love with her. The consequence will be, that I shall be neglected shamefully, all on account of man's fickleness. Oh, you see, sir, that I understand all about you men!"

"Wise little woman," laughed Robert. "From personal experience, I suppose?"

"From keeping my eyes and ears open," answered Margery.

"But I thought you had faith in me?" he said, touching the brown hair that shaded her smiling, peaceful face.

"Well, yes, I have a little faith in you," she admitted.

"I don't see how you can have, taking your knowledge of the fickleness and insincerity of men into consideration," returned Mr. Earl, his fingers still lingering on the soft hair. "I should like to hear you explain the seeming inconsistency."

"Well, you see," with a laugh that was as happy as a bird's song, "you are not exactly like other men. I think you are a trifle—just a trifle, mind—better than the most of them. And then, you know that you of the stronger sex have a belief which passes current among you, to the effect that a woman is never consistent. Either will explain why I happen to put a little faith in you, sir."

"A good specimen of feminine logic," he said, laughingly. "How does it happen that you think me just a trifle better than most men, Margery?"

"Because—because—I care perhaps just a little for you," was Margery's answer, driven into a corner. And Robert Earl laughed until she blushed again.

The day of Miss Callingford's arrival came; and Mr. Earl happened to be there. All looked at her eagerly. A girl with a sweet clear face, out of which shone a pair of the most beautiful eyes Robert Earl had ever seen; large, and almost like a child's in their innocent expression, and blue as early violets. There was something about them that made him think of that flower. From under the pretty straw hat, soft yellow hair fell about her face, and hung over her shoulders almost to her waist.

"You are May, I know," cried Margaret, impulsively running to her. "We cannot tell you how welcome you are, and how we have longed for this day."

And for some moments there was nothing but greeting.

"This is my cousin May, Mr. Earl," said Margaret, proud of introducing one who had so fair and sweet a face.

"I am truly happy to meet your cousin May," said Robert, gravely; yet with a twinkle of mischief in his eyes, and a shy look at Margaret, who blushed beneath the inquiring glance which May gave her.

May gave him her hand, and said a few half-embarrassed words;

but they were enough to make him feel that he should like her. He had a theory that the first few words of a stranger always afforded him a kind of revelation of what the acquaintance was to be, by the way in which they affected him. If that theory held good in this case, the acquaintance would be a pleasant one.

In the evening, coming in to tea, he met her again. She wore a dress of some soft white material, with a knot of pale green at the throat, and a cluster of white geraniums in her hair.

"She is a beautiful little thing," thought Robert. "She is like my ideal of Undine."

Before tea was half over, he felt as if he must have known May for years. He said as much in a half-jesting way.

"Perhaps that fancy of someone's, that you were reading to me the other day, is true," spoke up Margaret. "You know what I mean, don't you, Robert? The fancy that we have been with people, somewhere and sometime, and yet we know that we and they have never before met."

"But how can it be?" asked May.

"Well, the idea in the book was that in some other life, some other stage of existence, we knew them, and that when we met in this life for the first time, some strange instinct that could hardly be called memory told us that we had not always been strangers to each other. Pretty and fanciful, is it not, May?"

"It would make a beautiful poem," answered May.

"So that probably accounts for your feeling of having known her, Robert," laughed Margaret.

There was some singing later. Margaret was a fine musician; played with peculiar power, and sang with a great deal of true feeling and expression. She had a low, sweet voice, which was just suited to some of the old ballads that we so seldom hear in these artificial days—for both the songs and the times are artificial now. May Callingford sang next. Her voice was sweet as a bird's. Robert Earl involuntarily thought of dropping water as he listened to its liquid softness.

"Sing that new song that you were trying this morning, Margaret," said Mrs. Wayne. "I liked it."

A moment's hesitation on Margaret's part, she knew not why, and then she looked out the song, and began. The air was touchingly tender and sweet in itself; the accompaniment was full of plaintive minor chords, like an undertone of sorrow that no words could express. The words were sad as any words could well be; and, sung in Margaret's expressive way, they seemed to come from her own heart:—

When I am covered with the grass,
If my low grave you chance to ass,
Oh pause one moment. one, I pray,
And in that surely-coming day,

Say, as you pluck the pimpernel,
 "Here lieth one who loved me well."

And so I shall not be forgot;
 You'll miss me, though you love me not.
 Love is so sweet a memory
 That, though it came to you from me,
 You'll think of it, and thrill to tell
 That one has lived who loved you well.

Oh! when you pass my grave, and see
 The blossoms blooming for the bee,
 And hear the south-wind saying mass,
 Like wandering friars who chance to pass,
 O'er incense cups of pimpernel,
 Oh, think of her who loved you well!

The last low chord of the accompaniment died away like a sigh. There was a silence in the room after Margaret had finished the song. It seemed to affect them strangely. She had put so much soul into it that it was hardly like a song. It was more like the passionate plaint of a heart to whom love had been denied; a heart trying, in a pitiful way, to find some little consolation in the thought that, after all, it would not be quite forgotten.

May broke the silence. "I don't like your song, Margaret," she said, with a shiver. "It is sorrowfully sweet, but I don't like it. I sha'n't forget it the whole evening. I never could sing such sad things."

"And yet such songs strike deeper chords in our hearts than any other," was Margaret's answer. "I never tire of songs like this. Your gay ones, with not a bit of heart and soul in them, I always sing under protest."

"But how sad that life must be which can truly give forth so sorrowful a cry as that which runs through the song you sang," observed Miss Callingford, looking thoughtfully away towards the hills bathed in summer moonlight. "It must be the saddest thing in life to be obliged to sit apart, and see others loving and being loved, while your heart calls for something which is always denied it."

"It would be far better to die," said Margaret, earnestly. "If I loved anyone with my whole heart, and that love should be thrown aside as unvalued, or unwelcome, I should wish to die!"

"So you say now," returned May. "But if you were put to the test——"

"If I were put to the test," interrupted Margaret, "it would be the same. I could not alter. Life to me without love would be valueless."

"'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all," quoted May, laughing.

"Not unless the loss be occasioned by death," answered Margaret, with strange gravity. "And that, after all, is not a loss. It is merely

a parting ; you are still able to look forward to a meeting which shall be eternal. I speak only of the alienation of the heart. This, indeed, is a change far worse than that of death."

" You feel strongly on this point," said May. " That is the reason, Margaret, that you put so much pathos into your song—that terrible song," she added, with a shudder. " It seemed to come straight up from your heart. And yet you have had no experience of this kind."

" No," replied Margaret, with a half sad smile. " But we know many things by intuition. We are, most of us, constitutionally happy or melancholy ; the bent of our nature is to be one or the other. We cast trouble aside when it comes to us, or we meet it half-way. I fear I am of the latter class. I have not enough hope to make me of a cheerful temperament ; I need the help of, and am greatly influenced by, externals."

" A path strewed with roses, for instance, from which the thorns have been extracted," laughed May. " A fairy godmother, to change pumpkins into coaches, and find you a prince for a husband."

Margaret blushed, and looked shily towards Robert. Her prince had come without the aid of any fairy godmother. She felt half vexed with May for the remark.

" You are jesting now," she replied, quietly. " But it is a subject I cannot jest with. Real sadness is so terrible. And I have always had a presentiment that my life would be a sad one."

" I know no one whose life should be more happy," returned May. " No one whose future seems to me so fair and promising. You have been reared in a home of peace and plenty ; and you will leave it under the protection of one ——"

" Be quiet," cried Margaret, laughing, in spite of herself. " It is true that my life hitherto has known no cares but the cares of others. I have had none of my own. But I often observe, that in proportion to the happiness of the early life so is the trouble and care of the later. I don't know why it should be ; but it is so. No doubt it is for some good end. I remember some years ago having my fortune told ——"

" Oh, Margie," interrupted May, pretending to be shocked. " By an old witch in a red cloak, no doubt, who walked on a stick and was bent half double. With nose and chin that met like a pair of nut-crackers. Confess to the portrait."

" You must have seen her in a dream," replied Margaret, laughing. " You have described her exactly. Only you have not done justice to her eyes ; they were the blackest, most piercing eyes I ever saw. I wake up sometimes with those eyes upon me."

" And you crossed her hand with silver," continued May. " For that she would promise you a duke. Or perhaps you even crossed it with gold, and were promised a prince. Fie, Margaret ; could you put faith in an old witch?"

"I know not whether she could lay claim to the title of witch," replied Margaret, firmly; "but this I do know. She described some of my past life so accurately; things she could never have known; that I almost felt I was wrong in putting no faith in what she said of my future."

"And what said she of that future?" asked May, whose curiosity was aroused, in spite of her pretended ridicule.

"I cannot tell you all," replied Margaret, with a shudder. "But I will tell you a little. She looked long and closely at my hand with her keen black eyes—have you ever noticed my hand," said Margaret, interrupting herself, and holding it out for May's inspection. "Look at it, May."

May took the white, delicate hand, and examined the palm. It was strangely covered with lines, crossing and recrossing each other. No part was free.

"Do you observe the creases?" said Margaret. "Examine it by your own."

May's was comparatively smooth and free from lines.

"A strange difference indeed," said May. "But you don't put faith in this nonsense, Margaret? What said the old witch?"

"She said, looking, as I have told you, long and closely into my hand, 'Your past life, young lady, has been happy; free from trouble; free from any eventful circumstance. At the age of twenty a great change in life will come to you. Then beware. Your last hour will be at hand.'

"How shall I find my death, good mother?" I asked, half in ridicule, half frightened.

"I cannot see," she answered. "The line of life is dim; the end is concealed from me. But this I see; you will not die a natural death; you will not die in your bed. Yet you will not die by illness; you will not die by water. I dare not look further. I can only say beware. Refuse the change when it comes: continue for some years to live as you have lived hitherto, and I see that you will be saved, and you may live to a green old age. Despise my warning, and you are lost."

Margaret ceased speaking, and May did not reply. In Margaret's eyes there was a sad, far-away look, that seemed to penetrate into the future; a future without happiness.

Robert Earl had not spoken. Suddenly he began wondering what Margaret would do if he were to desert her for another. It was a strange thought, he told himself, to come into his head, then and there; but it did come, and he could not get rid of it. All the evening it haunted him: that, and the sad look in Margaret's eyes. It was with him when he walked home, and when he undressed to go to rest.

The days flew by swiftly, as pleasant days do fly. Mrs. Wayne had

said to Robert Earl, "You must be with us a great deal, to help entertain my niece : I should not like her to find this place more dull than it is." And he had acquiesced readily.

So that he saw much of May Callingford : he grew to seek to be with her. He liked to talk with her, and watch her beautiful eyes grow darker and wider at some new thought, or some sudden play of fancy. He half thought he could tell what she was thinking of by her face, it was so full of child-like frankness.

From the first May had liked Robert Earl. He was so different from any man she had ever known before. But in what the difference consisted, she could not have told herself : and not a suspicion yet dawned upon her that it was caused by *love* : that she was learning to love him.

"How noble Robert is!" she said one night to Margaret. "I don't know why I like him so well ; but I never cared half so much for anyone before. I think you ought to be very proud of him, Margie. I quite envy you."

The last words were spoken in a playful way ; but Margaret saw that there was more meaning in them than she intended to show. Beneath their lightness there ran a vein of earnestness. It made itself apparent in the thoughtful eyes and serious brow which May turned towards the hills, lying wrapt in holy, peaceful silence, beneath the benediction of the moonlight.

And Margaret's heart gave a sudden throb that was full of keen pain. Was her cousin learning to love Robert ? She could not wonder much if it were so, for who could help loving him ? But oh, not with her love ! No, no ! Her heart rebelled against that. She wanted him for herself ; and no one else must look with yearning eyes upon that which belonged to her, and her alone.

It is curious how a chance word, light as the lightest wind, will set us to thinking and watching sometimes. Those words of May's had that effect on Margaret. She lay awake half that night, thinking. What if May loved Robert ? She tried to put the thought out of her mind, but it would not leave her.

"How foolish I am !" she thought. "Of course, it would not make the slightest difference between Robert and me, if all the Mays in the world loved him. He cares for me—has he not told me so?—and for no one else in the whole world.

Nevertheless, that foolish question—that thought—kept repeating itself over and over for hours in Margaret's mind. She could not forget it while she slept : worse still, she could not forget it in awaking. Was it the shadow of some evil substance ?

In spite of herself, Margaret watched them when they were together next day ; she could not help it. As Mr. Earl entered, she saw May's face grow hot and glad and bright ; and—she fancied that his did. Then she blamed herself for being so foolish as to imagine any such

thing. He liked May as his cousin—who could help liking her?—and he had that low-voiced, caressing way with women.

But from that time there was a dark cloud over Margaret's sky. It grew large and black. For, try to hide the truth as she might, she could not conceal the knowledge from herself, that no common friendship existed between her cousin and the man she had promised to marry. She read the bitter fact in sudden glances of tenderness, in low words, which in themselves revealed nothing, but in whose cadences love spoke in that strange and wordless language of its own. She could interpret it, because it was a language she had been learning to read the sweetest lesson of life in.

At first she fought against the bitter truth. She would not believe that the man who had won her love, and who, before heaven, was her promised husband, had no longer the true affection for her that he had once boasted of. She tried to believe that she was self-deceived: that she was jealous of her lover without a cause, because she loved him so, and wanted him always at her side in a foolishly exacting way.

But there will come a time when our eyes, which we shut against a bitter truth, must open, and we have to look the matter fairly and squarely in the face. And that time came to Margaret.

She was in the garden one day alone. Her countenance of late had grown sad, full of thoughtful shadows; and, as she walked up and down the paths slowly, a great pain showed itself in her eyes, and in the lines around her mouth.

"Am I losing him?" she cried, passionately. "Am I to see him go over to another? And I thought he loved me so well! He told me so! He told me so!"

Just then she heard the murmur of voices, and, looking up, saw May and Robert going slowly towards the house, on the other side the shrubbery. The foliage concealed her from them.

Robert was saying something to May in a low, earnest tone. Margaret could not tell what it was, but something in his look and manner made her for the moment faint and dizzy. The words reached her ears.

"God bless you, my darling!" And then Robert Earl—her lover—bent suddenly, and kissed May's face, which was wet with tears.

"Oh, Robert!" May cried, "you forget! I have told you, you must not forget. Margaret is the only one who has a right to your kisses. Nay, I must not listen: though you do love me, you must still be true to your promise to her. I wish I had never come here. If I had stayed away, you and Margaret might have been happy; but now —"

May Callingford's voice broke down in tears, and she turned and ran away towards the house, leaving Robert standing there alone, with a grave and shadowed face. Alas! it was too true that love had come to him.

Could Margaret make believe to deceive herself longer? At last she knew the truth: she stood face to face with it.

He loved her! Robert Earl, who was dearer to her than her whole life, loved another. And that other her cousin, beautiful May! She kept repeating the hard truth over and over, as she stood there in the garden; and it seemed as if every bird's song said the same thing.

For hours she paced up and down the walks, thinking, thinking, thinking!

What should she do? Should she give him back his freedom; and thus, with her own hands, put all the sunshine out of her life which his love had brought into it? A whole, whole life without him! Her heart cried out against that. But could she marry him, knowing that he loved another? Could she lay claim to that heart which she had once thought hers, but was hers no longer? No, no!

"Where is May?" she asked when she went in. And Mrs. Wayne replied that May had a headache and was lying on the sofa in the quiet little breakfast-parlour.

The young ladies shared the same bed-room. May went up first that night, under plea of her headache; and Margaret hoped she would be in her bed and asleep. But no. When Margaret went, May was sitting by the window, with a strange, pitiful look on her face.

"Oh, Margie! Margie!" she cried, when her cousin came in, "I am so miserable. You don't know, you can't know what it is; and I—I cannot tell you. And bending her head upon the window-ledge, the girl sobbed as if her heart was breaking.

"I do know," Margaret said, softly.

May flashed a sudden, frightened look into her cousin's face. "No one can know. It is not possible."

"I am not blind," answered Margaret, as calmly and kindly as might be, but there was a strange sound of pain in her voice. "I see how it is, May, and I think it will all come right. If you love each other, I will not stand between you."

No one but herself and God ever knew what an awful struggle it cost her to say that. The words left her lips white as death.

Margie, are you an angel?" gasped May. "Only an angel could offer to give up a life's hope and happiness to another. Do you think I am base enough to accept it, at that price? Never, never!"

"But, May"—and Margaret's voice was low and steady now—"I want a man's whole love; a love that is given freely. Could I take Robert Earl because he thinks I have a claim on any promise he may have made, before he fully understood his love has left me—do you think I could be his wife?"

"But he does love you!" returned May, earnestly. "Yes, he told me so to-day. The—the fancy he took for me is not real; and —oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish I had never come here, Margie! If Robert

and I had never met, he would never have dreamed of loving anyone else but you. I have brought trouble to you, and to him, and to myself, and I am not to blame, Margie. I wish you would believe that!" added May, earnestly, lifting her great, blue eyes to Margaret's face; and they were too truthful to be doubted. Margaret spoke not. She listened for more. *Was there hope for her yet?*

"No, Margaret, I never tried to make Robert Earl love me. Could I be so wicked and treacherous? I liked him from the first too much, too much; but, oh! I could not help it: I did not tell the love to come: and I never meant to let either of you find it out. But, somehow, he did find it out, and I don't know how it happened, Margie, but he said some things to-day before he thought. It's all over now. I'm not going to see him when he comes here any more, and he will forget all about me in a little while. He's too good, too honourable to break his word with you, Margie, even if he wanted to; and I don't think he ever thought of that. Forgive me, Margie, but I never meant to pain you."

Margaret bent down, and kissed the pale, suffering face tenderly: a tear from her eyelids fell upon May's cheek. No, the poor young girl had not been intentionally cruel.

"Oh, Margie, you are so good!" involuntarily burst from May, flinging her arms about her cousin's neck, and hiding her face in her bosom. "I don't believe I could ever kiss anybody like that who had brought me the trouble that I have brought to you."

"But you did not wish to bring it," answered Margaret, softly. "If you had tried to win Robert away, I think I should have hated you with a terrible hatred. As it is, I cannot blame you."

"And it's all ended between Robert and me," May sobbed. "He understands that. And I shall leave you for home, Margaret, as soon as I can.

But there was no comfort for Margaret in May's words. Perhaps, in one sense, it might be all ended between Robert and May. But, knowing of the love between them, could she accept such a sacrifice as he must make in giving up May? If he loved May—as Margery believed he did—could he forget her? And she herself, she could not marry him if his heart was another's."

For a whole week Robert Earl did not come near the house. He knew not of any explanation; but he believed, as matters stood, he was better away from it.

One morning a maid came up-stairs to say Mr. Earl was below. May would not see him. "You go, Margie," she said. "I will not. He is yours only, and I will not come between you again. Remember that."

Margaret went down to meet Robert, with a pale, grave face. She tried to be calm, and outwardly she succeeded. But her heart was full of a strange and wild excitement.

At the first glance into her face, he knew that what he had hoped to keep secret from her was a secret no longer. It is only justice to Robert Earl to say that he meant to be honourable and true. He had resolved that neither May nor Margaret should discover the disloyalty of his heart; but in an unguarded moment his lips had got the better of his intentions, and in a few, swift, passionate words, he had told May that he loved her.

He never, thinking it over afterwards, realized fully what his words to Margaret were that day, nor what her replies were. The first that he comprehended clearly was when Margaret came up to him, and put her hand upon his arm, and looked him steadily in the face. There was no anger in it. It was kind, and sadly earnest.

"I know all, Robert," she said, simply. "May has told me. I do not blame either of you, because you could not help it. We cannot control our hearts. I am ready to give you back your ring, Robert—if you want it!"

She could not help saying those last words. Some faint hope stirred in her heart yet—that selfish heart of hers, she told herself—that he would refuse to accept his freedom; that he would prove to her that he loved her most.

"Margaret!"

Robert Earl covered his face with his hands, and was silent for a long time. When he looked up his face was very pale.

"I do not want the ring," he answered. "No."

"But—if it should be rightly hers?" gasped Margaret.

He was nearly as agitated as she was. "There must be truth between us now, Margaret, if nothing else. Believe me when I say that I do not understand my own heart. I believe I love you. I try to think of you always; but—but May's face keeps coming between us."

"Which is it?" breathed Margaret, from between her bloodless lips. "I don't understand."

"Nor I," he murmured. "Margaret, I don't deserve your kindness. I'm not half good enough for you, but I'll try to be. I am going away, and shall stay away until May has left; and I shall try to forget her, and remember only you. Perhaps I shall understand my heart better when I come back. At any rate, it is better for all of us that I should leave. As to the ring, keep it, Margaret; at least, no one as yet has any better right to it."

"God bless you, Robert!" Margaret said, softly. "I will keep your ring; and oh, Robert!"—and her voice was full of the passionate yearning for the happiness which seemed slipping away from her—"I would wear it gladly, if your love could be given with it! But if you find that your heart is more May's than mine, I will give it back to you. Unless your heart goes with the ring, it would be a fetter to me."

"You are a noble woman, Margaret," he said, putting his fingers on

her hair in the old caressing way. "I wonder how I ever could have cared for anyone else?"

Then he did care for her! The thought was so sweet! Margaret laid her head upon his shoulder, and he knew that she was weeping softly.

Mr. Earl went away, and the days crept on. Miss Callingford did not leave at present, some arrangements in her own family forbidding it. A strange, grieved look stole now and then into May's face that was sorrowful to see. Margaret always wanted to get away by herself and cry, when she saw it: she knew what May was thinking of.

Those were strange weeks to Margaret. Often it seemed to her as if she was a prisoner waiting for her sentence. Would it be life or death? Sometimes she was buoyant with wild hope; sometimes sunk in utter despondency.

And now the end of May's stay was really drawing near: and Margaret began to feel, in some strange and unaccountable way, that Robert would come back to her and tell her that he had found out his own heart, and it was hers. The feeling clung to her, and she began to be more like the Margaret of old than she had been for a long time.

"The Morrow is very near," May said, on the last night of her visit, as she and Margaret were sitting by the window together. Everything was in readiness for her departure. "But, Margaret, I do not want to leaye you feeling that there is any bitterness in your heart towards me, any blame for the past. You are sure, quite sure, that there is not?"

"I am quite sure," Margaret answered. "How could I blame you for that which you could not help?"

"I hope you will be very happy, Margie, you and Robert," May said, as she smoothed Margaret's hair tenderly back from her face. There was a quiver of pain in her voice; and tears came in Margaret's eyes as she heard it. "So young, so beautiful," ran her thoughts, "and to have so dreadful a sorrow to carry with her into coming years. Poor May!"

"I hope so," earnestly spoke Margaret, in answer. "May God be as good to you, May, as I hope He will be to me!"

The same night, in the depth of sleep, Margaret was aroused by a voice of terror calling to her from the other bed. She started up.

"What is it?" she asked. "Is anything the matter, May?"

"I think the house is on fire. Don't you hear it roar? And the room is full of smoke."

They sprang out of bed, and ran to the door; but had to shut it again as soon as opened. The landing, close to their room, was one vast billow of flame.

"Oh! what shall we do—what shall we do?" cried May, wildly. "There is no way of getting down; no way of escape!"

"Oh, Margaret! are we to die in this way?"

"I don't know, dear," answered Margaret, retaining her presence of mind, as she ran to the window. "Perhaps we can escape in some way. See! the neighbours are gathering. They will help us."

Unfastening the window, she flung it open. "Help! Help!" she cried. "Get a ladder, if you can. The house is full of fire."

At that moment a man came rushing in at the gate, pushing the assembling people right and left. Margaret knew him, and her heart gave a great leap.

"Robert, Robert, you will save us!" she cried. "Oh, May, I think God has sent him! He will dare what the others might not."

The fire was inside the room now: the wood of the old house was as tinder. The flames leaped and roared all about them. They heard the crash of falling timbers. Suddenly the ceiling above them fell, filling the room with a whirling mass of flame and smoke.

"Haste, haste!" cried Margaret to the men below. "The room is all on fire!"

Before the words left her lips, the end of a ladder appeared, and she heard a man's feet moving swiftly up the rounds.

"Oh, May, courage, courage!" she sobbed. "They are coming to save us."

Even at that self-same moment, the man's head was at the window, looking in.

"May! May!" he cried, in an eager voice, that was full of wild passion, of love, and awful fear. "My darling, where are you?"

"Here, here!" replied May, and sprang towards the window. "Oh, Robert, save me, save me!"

"I will save you, or die with you," he said; and his voice was full of a deeper tenderness than Margaret had ever heard in his voice before. "Cling to me, May; cling close, and trust me!"

And so Robert Earl chose between them! Oh, Margaret, where was your hope, then?

"Let me die!" she cried, with pallid lips: but it was not the fear of death which blanched them. "He does not love me. Let me die!"

And Margaret's prayer was answered. The smoke reached out fierce hands, and overshadowed her, before other help could arrive. It may have been—and the thought passed through her heart in dying—that Robert Earl did not know she was there.

There is a grave in a churchyard on the hill-side on which the grass has only grown one summer. It is that of Margaret Wayne.

"Almost the last words Margaret ever spoke were to tell me that she had no bitterness in her heart towards me," sobbed May one day, as she stood by it with her husband. "Dear Margaret! I think she is happier now than she would have been, even with you, Robert."

"Perhaps so," he answered, reverently. "God knows best!"

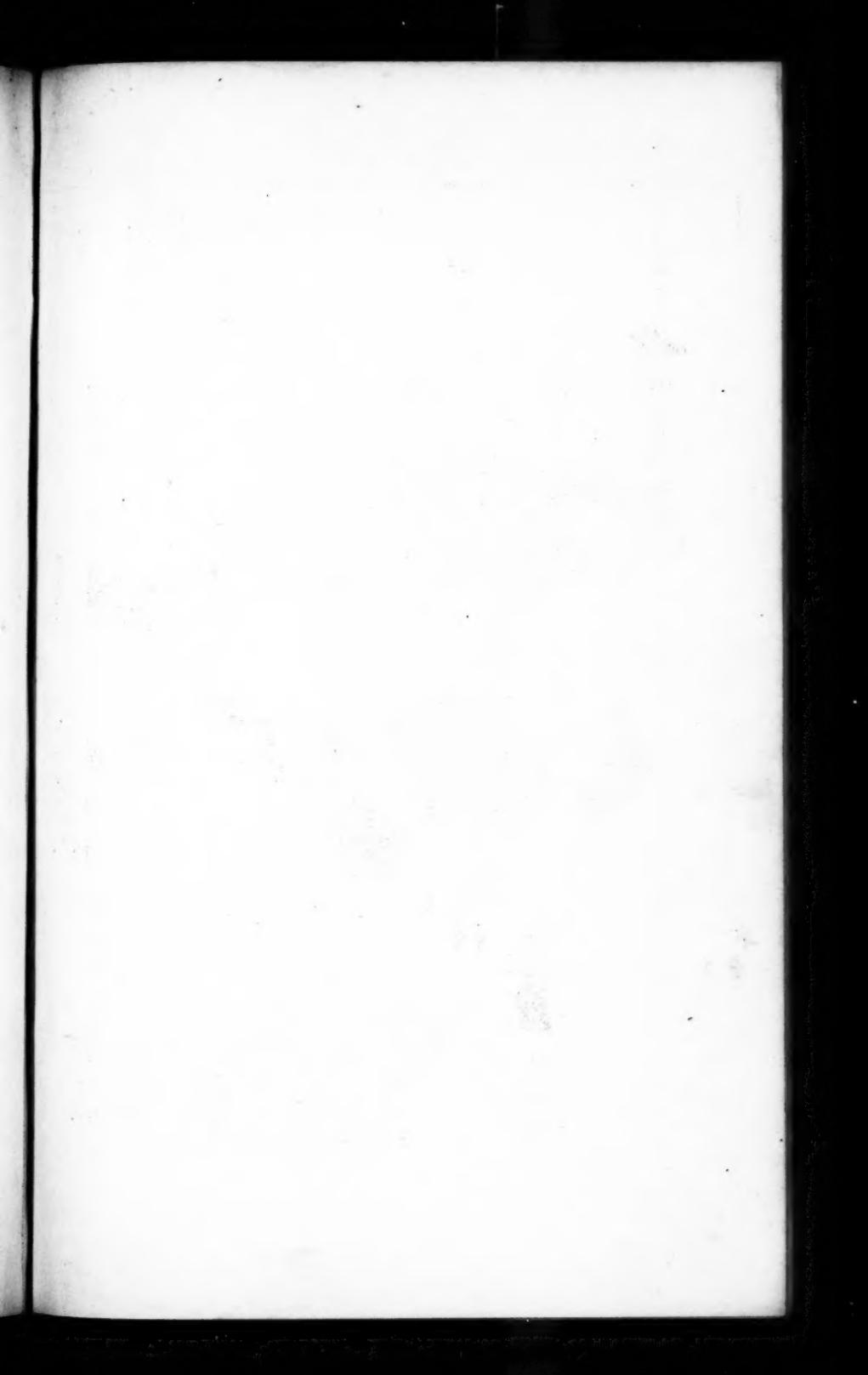
THREE KISSES OF FAREWELL.

THREE, only three, my darling,
 Separate, solemn, slow ;
 Not like the swift and joyous ones
 We used to know,
 When we kissed because we loved each other,
 Simply to taste love's sweet,
 And lavished our kisses as the summer
 Lavishes heat ;
 But as they kiss whose hearts are wrung,
 When hope and fear are spent,
 And nothing is left to give, except
 A sacrament !

First of the three, my darling,
 Is sacred unto pain ;
 We have hurt each other often,
 We shall again,
 When we pine because we miss each other,
 And do not understand
 How the written words are so much colder
 Than eye and hand.
 I kiss thee, dear, for all such pain
 Which we may give or take ;
 Buried, forgiven before it comes,
 For our love's sake.

The second kiss, my darling,
 Is full of joy's sweet thrill ;
 We have blessed each other always,
 We always will.
 We shall reach until we feel each other,
 Beyond all time and space ;
 We shall listen till we hear each other
 In every place ;
 The earth is full of messengers,
 Which love sends to and fro ;
 I kiss thee, darling, for all joy
 Which we shall know !

The last kiss, oh ! my darling—
 My love—I cannot see,
 Through my tears, as I remember
 What it may be.
 We may die and never see each other,
 Die with no time to give
 Any sign that our hearts are faithful
 To die, as live.
 Token of what they will not see
 Who see our parting breath.
 This one last kiss, my darling, seals
 The seal of death !



AH

J. SWAIN.

ON THE BROAD YELLOW SANDS.

SWAIN N.Y.
A. HOPKINS.

